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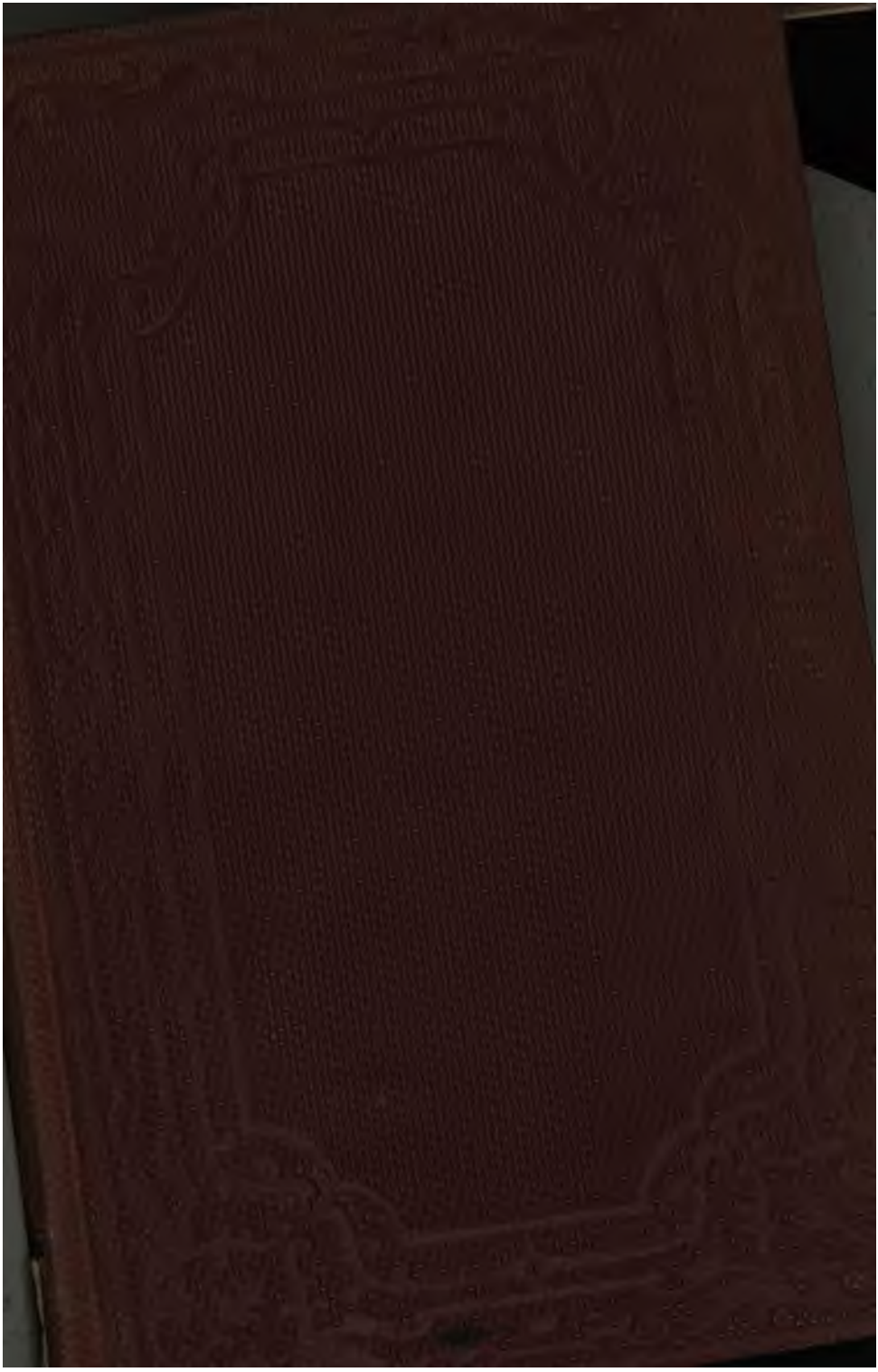

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MARGARET HAMILTON.

A NOVEL.

BY MRS. C. J. NEWBY,

AUTHOR OF "MABEL," "SUNSHINE AND SHADOW."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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MARGARET HAMILTON.

CHAPTER I.

We have said that the fearful stroke which had deprived Mr. Hamilton of the power of working, and had taken from his family all hope of independent support, was followed by a heavy lethargic rest. For the first few days, the task of watching and tending the invalid was one of comparative ease, for it was but a simple duty with no complication about it to weary the brain or test the power of thought.

As time went on, the keenness of anxiety decreased, for it was found that the mind of the afflicted parent, although depressed and subdued, had every chance of recovering its healthy tone. But the use of the right side was entirely gone, and the chance of his living seemed to depend now upon the amount of attention and love he might be able to command. For all the purposes of the world's business he was now incapable. As his senses gradually returned to him, he woke to a sense of the heavy responsibilities which he had been so ready to cast away; and he found himself forced for the remainder of his life to stand aside, and (as he might have done in a separate existence) witness the struggles of his wife and children, suffering from what he had in madness or in cowardice, been willing to leave them to encounter alone. It was a terrible destiny which seemed in prospect for him, and how could one who had

shrunk from care, when he had the power to alleviate it, bear it now.

Splendid are the teachings of Divinity!

He, who, when health and strength were left him, rose in rebellion or sunk in despair, now bowed himself as a little child before the heavier blow, confessed its mercy, and returned to his allegiance.

When the first feelings of excitement had passed away, Margaret recovered both her composure and her energy. For the first few days she seldom left her father's bedside. Her affectionate care for him had very much to do with her constant watch over his returning faculties; but there was also another cause which prevented her leaving him. No confidence had been exchanged between herself and her mother, as to the hasty words which had led to so much evil; not being able therefore to understand the repentance which had followed them, she had still a sensitive fear of

exposing her father to the violence of her mother's temper, for both their sakes. Mrs. Hamilton felt this watch to be, as indeed it was, in fact, a reproach to herself; but she was too much subdued to remonstrate.

In common with many others, Mrs. Hamilton might have complained that though our faults are exposed to many eyes, our repentance, if it be sincere, is mostly secret and unseen. But she was no philosopher, and therefore she contented herself with acting chiefly upon the impulse of the moment, in endeavouring to meet the evil which had befallen them as cheerfully as she could.

It would be difficult to describe the mingled feelings of earthly desolation and heavenly peace, which visited the mind of Margaret, as she thus kept watch by her father's side.

To hear his voice, gentle and calm, to listen to his almost childlike hope of pardon for the past, to witness his perfect resigna-

tion, broken only by anxious fears for his family, and his perfect self-abnegation of every thought and feeling, poured balm indeed into her wounded spirit. Her prayers were answered, his mind was at peace, he rested now beneath the shadow of that great Rock, which, from all ages and to all time, stands as the shelter of the spiritually needy. Knowing this, she could bear to wait calmly amidst the wreck of all earthly hope; with no apathy or indifference, indeed, but with an almost cheerful energy which puzzled her mother greatly, but which could not have puzzled her had she known the deep workings of her constant love, the long and painful and almost mother's watch which she had sustained for so many months.

"Margaret," said Mr. Hamilton one afternoon. Margaret looked up from the book which was lying open before her, and which she had been trying to read, though it had cost half an hour to turn one page.

"Margaret," he timidly repeated, "you must write to Mr. Travers."

"Yes!" said Margaret faintly. How much or how little it occurred to her, did her father remember of her revelations concerning him? Something, however, in the tender tone of his voice brought the warm blood rushing to her pale face.

"Write as if from me, my dear, thank him with such honest gratitude as I ought so much to feel, and you can so well express. Tell him, if you like, that all circumstances fit into their proper place, and dove-tail in their right order. So has his kindness come in its proper time. A few months back, and such an appointment as Lord S—— offers me, would have made me a discontented man for life, as it is, I suffer from a chastisement so severe, that I dare not be otherwise than thankful since my life is spared for repentance. Dear child! I dare not repine now if I would, I would not if I dared. Will you

write for me? no one else can do it half so well." Margaret rose, and stooping to kiss him, heard him whisper, as if fatigued, that he would remain alone.

She went down stairs to the drawing-room, for the hot weather made the little room down stairs oppressive, and took out her writing materials.

"What are you going to do?" enquired Mrs. Hamilton, for she was there, as well as Olivia and Alice.

"Papa wishes me to write to Mr. Travers," said Margaret bending over her desk.

She had felt that it had been impossible, in her mother's fretful mood, to make her her confidant with regard to him, and now it seemed like a thing so far gone by, that it would but awaken vexatious discussions, for which she felt totally unequal, forced as she had been to preserve a certain tranquillity of mind which

alone enabled her to take the lead at this sorrowful time.

"Ah, yes!" said Mrs. Hamilton, "only to think of it, almost drives one wild. Well! you must write. I thought of it two or three days ago; but I did not like to propose it. You must tell him how thankful we all are for his kindness, and what dreadful trouble we are all in; and you know I have been thinking, Margaret, that if he is so anxious to serve your papa, as no doubt he is, or he would not have spoken to Lord S——; why—don't you think he might do something for Frederick?"

Mrs. Hamilton always gave Fred his whole name, when bringing forward any question of ways and means.

"Oh, no!" said Margaret hurriedly, "impossible!"

"I do not see why, except that you are so

punctilious, child. You will let your brother starve, rather than stretch a point. He cannot be kept at school, now, it is plain; and what is the boy to do? I am sure if you are so much afraid of him, I am not, so you had better let me write."

"Papa particularly wished me to write," said Margaret apprehensively.

"Well then, write properly; tell him what a dreadful blow it is for us all, and that Mark also has nothing to do, except, indeed, that case of poor Jasper; which, however glad we may be of it, cannot help him on much, you know; and how we all lament having to take Frederick from under the care of such an excellent man as Mr. Smith; and what is to become of the boy, I do not know."

"I will write," said Margaret, "if you like to the Bishop of ——, he who used to be so intimate with all of us, would be likely to do more than a stranger."

Mrs. Hamilton was appeased by this

suggestion, and while she speculated with Alice as to the probability of the Bishop being able to do any thing, Margaret attempted her letter.

"My dear Sir." So far had she written, when a thousand recollections rushed upon, and almost overpowered her. Vividly came back, their first walk that Sunday afternoon at Hastings, when they had insensibly begun to understand each other, she could almost feel the balmy air of the country fields, and scent the pleasant fragrance of the thymy banks. How tender he had been of her, even then, how careful, ever since, what a strong arm and kindly heart would have been her stay now, if Aunt Ann had but left them to themselves. Then she remembered her father's words, "all circumstances fit into their proper place," and stilled the quick throbbing of her heart, and set herself again to write.

But it was not to the Mr. Travers, from whom she had so unceremoniously parted upon the downs, that she wrote now. The balmy air, and thyme-scented fields were over all her thoughts, and she poured out her confidence and her sorrow as if he were her lover and her true friend, as he had been; and oh! Aunt Ann, as he was, even now, as in that moment of happy dreaming, she knew full well.

It was but half-an-hour, stolen from sorrow and care and difficulty, but one half hour of girlish dreaming and womanly love, and then her dignity, not her love, reigned pre-eminent. She never meant to send the letter; and now she tears it up, and writes again, simply touchingly, gratefully, but coldly still. And then she folds the paper, and, with a dreamy consciousness, all the while, that in a few hours it will be in the hand she loves so well, she seals it, and it is ready for the post. Alice takes it, for somehow she is very fond of going

to the post and executing little errands abroad; but no one notices this now, not even Fred. Everything has bowed down and given way before the master-grief.

CHAPTER II.

THE happy mood of feeling which had visited Margaret, had in it very little of earth. Such a frame of mind is, perhaps, the peculiar blessing which rests upon the sincere Christian in the time of severe grief or bereavement. It has in it nothing which is either false or sickly, but it is marked by such a strength of enthusiastic faith as seems to bring to light unseen support, and to break down the barriers which separate us from the invisible world. It cannot last, would that it might, for the human

heart, while in this life, is not strong enough to sustain for any length of time, what is rather an inspiration than a part of humanity. It cannot last, but it leaves the spirit refreshed and strengthened for those active earthly duties, which, while life remains, we have no power of putting away from us.

It was in this frame of mind that Margaret brought her thoughts back to the exigencies of her present life, and addressed herself to them with all her native energy. She had spent the time in thought, which her mother had passed in gloomy foreboding; and, having arrived at a conclusion, she only waited to mature her plan before she mentioned it. It was no time she justly thought for vain consultations; it was a time rather when action was a necessity.

It was one evening, therefore, not much more than a week after the terrible stroke, which had laid Mr. Hamilton upon a bed of sickness, but time enough to have restored

something like its accustomed order to the little household, that they all sat at work down-stairs.

Mary had gone out, and there was, therefore, no danger to be apprehended from the near neighbourhood of the kitchen, if in the heat of discussion the voice of either one of the party were raised beyond the usual pitch. Mark was there, sitting near the window to catch as much of the evening air as could steal through it. They were always glad to have him, but to-night he was too full of anxious thought to be at all like his genial self, and the veins of his forehead seemed painfully contracted, as if he were enduring some present bodily suffering. He was very silent, too, contrary to his usual habit; still in trouble there seems strength in numbers, and in any mood they were glad to have him, Margaret most of all.

"Well, Mark, and what is to become of us?" said Mrs. Hamilton, breaking, at last, a silence which had perhaps purposely fallen upon them.

"I have been thinking, dear mother," returned Mark, in his most affectionate manner, "and shall be glad to learn your opinion. Happily I have had more to do for this last week, than I have had for the last year, but that, of course, is uncertain. You know what my income, from my fellowship is, that is yours; let us make the best of it. If you are so inclined, we will go into the country and rusticate upon it. If possible, however, I should still like to continue my profession; but that, of course, implies the necessity of chambers, and I will do as you like best."

Mark's little speech was made with some effort. He was generous to the heart's core, but he loved his profession, and he was already tasting the first fruits of his careful study of it.

"Oh, Mark! thank you," said Margaret, seeing that her mother was considering his offer, before she replied to it. "Your generosity ought to give us strength for

anything, and," she said, turning with a smiling face to her sisters, "I, too, have a plan to propose, a much better one than that of Mark, which shall restore mamma to more comforts, and give papa what he requires. And so, Mark, we will not rusticate on your fellowship, it is not half enough for us."

She said this to rally him from his stern mood; but the silent pressure with which she laid her hand on his, told him more than any words could have done, how much she appreciated his self-denial.

"What is your plan?" said Mark, his brow slightly clearing as he spoke, not that he really hoped anything from any effort of her's, but because it was a relief to find that any one thought of an independent course of action.

"This is it," said Margaret, more seriously, "we will open a ladies' school in our old neighbourhood, I think I am certain of meeting support there, and I feel that I am equal

to the attempt. At all events, let us try it for one year. You know how much money has been spent upon me, and that I have received as good an education as riches could purchase. All our former friends know this as well as I do. Alice and Olivia are quite fitted to take an able part in such an establishment, and mamma will take care of papa. It is, I know, a responsible office to undertake, but I hope," she added, humbly, "that I should fulfil it conscientiously; at least, we would try to do so."

"You give up all chance of settling then for yourself or your sisters?" enquired Mrs. Hamilton.

"I do not think so," said Margaret, steadily, "to marry into our old station is now extremely unlikely; but an honest man, seeking a wife, will not think the less of us because we have done our duty. I speak of Alice and Olivia, for myself I should look upon this as a settlement."

"But the outlay," said Mark, "would be more than we could possibly meet."

"Aunt Ann will be ready to do a great deal for us," said Margaret, "and you, Mark, will just at first do something too; but mine is an independent scheme, and unless I get shipwrecked, I will accept no more than this; your and her guarantee to those from whom I shall require credit for a house, furniture and provisions. I assure you, I will not attempt this without a promise of a certain number of pupils, and I believe that I shall get them. Ours must be a fashionable school, at the West End, and I do believe in as much good in human nature as this, that if our former friends had seen a way to help us, they would have done so. They could not, you know, offer us 'soveriegns,' as they might to the child in 'Bleak House.' Depend upon it, however, they shall now offer us hundreds of the brilliant coins."

The plan as proposed seemed so perfectly feasible, that no one objected, and yet when Mark looked at his favourite sister, he sighed heavily.

"You think with mamma, Mark," said Margaret gravely, "but consider the alternative. Papa could not be supported properly, nay, scarcely in the poorest manner, were your fellowship money dedicated solely to him, while, at the same time, we sacrifice your prospects, which are so dear to us all, and without greatly benefiting ourselves, ruin you. Is it likely! I am speaking not religiously but in a worldly manner, is it likely that the world would think more of us, because we sacrificed the probability of doing so much good for the sake of a chimera?

"It is likely," said Mark, sadly, "for the world has its prejudices."

"Then I renounce the world," said Margaret.

"And so do I in that sense," said

Olivia. "Oh, Mark! oh, mamma! let us do what Margaret says? I can teach German, and Italian, and history, at least, about twice as much as Lydia and Julia Talbot learned in ten years at Miss Dolby's; for, after all, they could not translate a sentence without a dictionary, and they thought Cyrus inherited the kingdom of Babylon, instead of having conquered it."

"That possibly arose from a natural inability to learn," said Fred, laughing, "I believe all education would be the same to them; but I think," pursued he, "that Margaret's is a capital scheme; and I have one, too, Mark. I like Latin and Greek very well, it is true, but they shall not stand in my way. If my sisters work, I will; and I only want all of you to consent, and I will find a way for myself."

"How?" said Mark.

"I will go into some mercantile house in the city, even if I begin as low as

Whittington. Only say that you will not be ashamed of me."

"Ashamed!" said Mark, "ashamed! I shall glory in you!"

"And not cut me if you see me with an apron on."

Mark had his prejudices, and the vision of the apron staggered him.

"My dear boy! try what you can, but decide upon nothing until you have consulted me."

"I promise," said Fred. "But in the meanwhile, mother, you will give me liberty to do what I like."

"Yes, my poor child; we are all going to ruin, and it does not much signify how we go, or what we wear. Oh! to think that I should ever live to see the day when my children should be governesses, and stand behind counters with aprons on. It does not matter, do with me what you please."

"You forget, my dear mother," said Mark, with unusual sternness, "that all these efforts are proposed for your's and my father's sake"

"I know it—I know it! But I wish you would put me under the ground first," sobbed Mrs. Hamilton.

Burying alive not being admissible in England, and parricide being equally liable to objection, this request, moderate as it was, was received in negative silence.

The pause thus produced in a conversation which had been hitherto rapid and energetic, gave time for consideration, and it was then that all became aware, that Alice was fidgetting, and flushing in a manner which was very unusual to her quiet and self-possessed manner. Taking advantage of the silence, she said, with very little appearance of timidity, however, as she turned to her elder sister.

"I am afraid, Margaret, that I shall

not be able to aid your scheme, although it seems very cleverly designed."

"Why not?" said Margaret, gently.

"Because I have other plans for myself, which, I believe, you will all agree in thinking to be wise. Mr. Smith has kindly asked me to be his wife; and, we have only waited for papa to be able to see him, to obtain, what I suppose, is but a nominal consent."

"You, Alice? Mr. Smith?" was echoed by the astonished coterie. None knew exactly why, but the proposition was met with unusual repugnance from almost all of them. There seemed something unnatural in the union of so young a girl, possessing a full share of natural advantages, with her well-formed figure, and by no means plain face, with Mr. Smith. But, perhaps, there was something more yet displeasing to them in the ungirlish manner in which the statement was made.

"Of course," continued Alice, seeing that a somewhat ominous silence had succeeded, "I told Mr. Smith that I had no fortune; but he is considerate enough to see that, by marrying, he saves the expense of a lady housekeeper for the boys. If," she added, with a little assumption of patronage, "I could have foreseen Margaret's proposed plan, and that I might have been of so much use to you, I might have reconsidered this; but I preferred marrying to going out as a governess."

"Oh, Alice!" cried Olivia, "do you love Mr. Smith?"

A look of something like contempt was the only reply.

"You have not answered the question," said Mark, "and I wish you had. A romantic attachment could alone excuse so young a girl in acting so entirely upon her own authority."

"I referred to papa, Mark," said Alice,

"as I said just now, and his illness has alone prevented Mr. Smith's speaking to him."

"But this has not prevented your speaking to your mother, or to us."

"Poverty," said Alice, bitterly, "has made us independent, and taught us to shift for ourselves; besides, I can conceive no objection that any of you can make to Mr. Smith. Mamma understood his intentions, or I am greatly mistaken."

"I had some suspicion of them, my dear, certainly," said Mrs. Hamilton, in an encouraging tone.

"I do not see any particular objection to Mr. Smith himself," said Mark, after another pause, "but his situation now, as tutor to very young boys, as schoolmaster, in fact, must introduce you, if you marry him, to a life of drudgery, even before you have caught a glimpse of the world. Times may mend with us, and you may live to

repent your hasty choice; for remember that marriage fixes your fate definitely. I do intreat you, leave it open until you can judge better for yourself than you possibly can now."

"It is a subject which I have already well thought over," said Alice, "I cannot endure the life of privation which we have led for the last two years. It is quite beyond my power, and although Mr. Smith is too poor a man to do anything to help you, he does lessen the burden at home, by taking me off your hands, you must see that as well as I do."

Alice was perversely refusing to believe that real affection for her alone actuated Mark. Perhaps, she was herself too quietly selfish not to suspect some covert motive in the actions of others. None perhaps are so really blind as the suspicious.

"If I could only think Alice, that you were doing this from sincere affection for

Mr. Smith," rejoined Mark, "I should be quite willing to forget the onerous position his wife must hold; but he is full twice your age, and such an affection seems to me unlikely."

"Mr. Smith does not require romantic affection," said Alice quietly, "he is not a man of this world, and takes a higher view of these things than ordinary people do."

"Nonsense!" said Mark impatiently, "he is a man like other men; but once more I make you a fair offer, I will work myself to death to procure you comforts if you need them, rather than any reason less than affection for this gentleman should lead you to marry. Say but those few words, 'I love him,' with honesty and candour, and I am contented; but if I thought the pressure of present circumstances had led you to take this step, at your age, too, Alice, I think it would cling like a curse to me through life."

"What have you to do with it?" said

Alice, so quietly, that Mark's enthusiasm died out. "Have you not done all you could? surely you have sacrificed enough to make you free of any course we may choose to take. I assure you I am only too anxious to remove part of the burden from you. I shall be very happy if you let me do as I like; but, of course, I shall be vexed if you all take it so ill, and what for I really cannot tell. Margaret herself laid it down as an axiom just now, that there was no longer any hope of our marrying into our former station, and I consider that Mr. Smith is equal to any station we are likely to attain."

"Of course, my dear," said Mrs. Hamilton. "I think, Mark, quite enough has been said; for my part I think Mr. Smith a most worthy, sensible man, and Alice is fortunate in getting such a man to take care of her. It is not as if she had the fortune she might have had, and could pick and choose. I am sure it is quite a relief to my mind to think

that one of my poor girls will have a house of her own. I will undertake to break it to her papa, and if he consents, I hope no one else will find fault, though I own it might have been more suitable if it had been Margaret instead of Alice."

"You need not fear, mamma," said Alice, "I shall do my duty by Mr. Smith."

"Well!" said Mark, "take a little time still, and if you have entangled yourself against your better feelings, confide in me and I will help you out, taking all the blame upon myself. Think how young you are, and how long a life may be before you, and do not let any false pride prevent your taking pity on yourself—"

"And jilting Mr. Smith," said Alice concluding the sentence, "I have given him my solemn word, and I really do not see what temptation there is for me to break it."

"Margaret's plan opens the hope of an honourable competency," said Mark.

"But who can secure us from a second bankruptcy?" said Alice. "I am not ambitious, and when an honest way of escape presents itself, I cannot starve. We have all had enough of it. You think me very worldly and common-place, no doubt, but what I am doing is quite natural."

What more could be said? The matter, it was clear, must be left to Mr. Hamilton's judgment; and the family circumstances, perhaps, as they were at that moment, could not justify any further remonstrance.

Mark's promises of support might end as other day dreams had done. Margaret's daring might, indeed, lead to a second bankruptcy, and then who should say that Alice had done wrong in securing herself a separate position?

She must be left to decide for herself,

and yet it fell upon them as a painful conviction, that Alice's nature had really been corrupted, and not elevated by trial. The young impulses of girlhood had merged with unnatural rapidity into the calculations of age.

"Oh, poverty!" exclaimed Margaret, when that night she knelt in her room alone, "it is a weary thing, well might the wise man of old, pray against the temptations it brings. Poverty! poverty! I have felt its sting before—I feel it now."

CHAPTER III.

Mrs. Daventry had become an almost daily visitor in Starborne Street, ever since her hurried return to town. Her brother's illness had saddened and subdued her very much, and yet her presence was a relief. Grief which breaks down reserve more surely than any other reconciler, had enabled Margaret to meet her with something very like her old candour and affection, and if any thing more had been needed, it would have been found in the almost

touching way in which she was ready to blame herslf.

Very deeply did she now regret the loss of Mr. Travers, whose liberality and kindness would have been so acceptable, as she imagined. She little thought that to Margaret this afforded the only sense of relief, which, in connection with him, she was capable of feeling, that she was spared the suspicion, which might have attached to her affection, if her rich suitor had found himself immediately surrounded by a sorrow stricken and ruined family.

Aunt Ann was incapable of appreciating such natural, but tender delicacy of feeling, but she was fully susceptible of the keenest grief for the sorrows which had fallen like a shadow over the beauty of her 'red, red rose.'

She was very much with her brother, and seemed evidently to experience a greater com-

fort in his presence than she had known since the failure of the bank. Accustomed to look up to him, it had made her uneasy to find that he depended upon her. But now he had resumed his place. The dignity of affliction attached itself to him now, and the re-awakening of the better spirit within him, although unseen by all but Margaret, more fully restored him to himself, and recalled to him that respect which had belonged to him in his wealthier days. It is not prosperity so much as self-respect which is so often caused by prosperity as to be mistaken for it, which creates respect in others; and there is no self-respect which has a deeper root than that which is the fruit of a righteous confidence in a just, but merciful Providence.

Meanwhile, the proposals made by Mr. Smith absorbed the family attention entirely, and caused Margaret's school-keeping scheme, as Aunt Ann termed it, to sink into comparative insignificance.

"I will not hear of it," Aunt Ann had said; "some of us must think of some better plan than that."

Margaret knew poor Aunt Ann's plans were very airy always, and she did not trust very much to them; but when we are very sorrowful we catch at straws.

"Why, my dear," said she, as they strolled up and down the tiny kitchen garden at the back of the house, Aunt Ann having just returned from a visit of inspection which she had paid to Mr. Smith, in the drawing-room, "he is a very presentable man, remarkably so; he is just a little too demonstrative of his religion; but, I understand, that he was originally educated for the church, and, by-the-bye, there would be no great difficulty in his entering it now. If you marry an influential man, or Mark becomes one, he may knock off the school altogether with a fat living, and then you will say Alice has done remarkably well. And, you romantic one, she has acted

more sensibly, and kindly, and effectively than any of you; for, let me tell you, that removing herself is lessening the family burden very considerably."

"Oh, yes!" said Margaret, faintly, for she would have given very much to believe that 'circumstances' had not too much influenced the young girl's choice; but she dared not confess her fears to one who received confidence as a sieve receives water.

"She is a very wise girl," pursued Aunt Ann, rather vexed to find that her niece neither heartily acquiesced nor contradicted, "and she shall have the handsomest wedding-dress and veil which London can furnish."

"We need not talk of that yet, dear aunt," said Margaret, half smiling at the unsuitableness of the gift.

"Ah, yes! but indeed we may, for Mr. Smith, your mamma says, is anxious

to be married in the Michaelmas holidays; and they, you know, are close at hand."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Margaret, and then she added, more composedly, "what need is there of so much haste? why not give her time to think?"

"And to be silly," said Aunt Ann, laughing, "no, no, none of that; when a girl makes up her mind and there is no objection, the sooner everything is arranged the better."

"Ah, dear aunt, think how young she is!" said Margaret; "young for an ordinary marriage; but here she will have to replace an elderly lady in the management of a host of little boys."

"You speak of an ordinary marriage, my dear; now Alice never would have made an ordinary marriage, and she feels herself able to contend with those duties which, I own, would be too much for me.

She appears to me discontented with her home, and thinks that she shall be happier married. Now, Margaret, just think for a moment, is her family at this moment in a position to lay down the law to its members? And, if it could, would it be wise to do so?"

"No, no," said Margaret; "and yet I would give her time to be certain of her own mind."

"Depend upon it, she knows that very well already. My poor brother's life hangs, as you know, by a mere thread, and it is very important that no obstacle should be thrown in the way of such a safe and honourable provision for one of you. My love, you are the very sweetest and most high-minded girl I know, but you must want common sense, or you would think with me."

"Perhaps I do," said Margaret, sighing, and yet her thoughts would recur with

provoking obstinacy to the question asked by Olivia, "Do you love Mr. Smith?"

"I wish you would come home with me this afternoon, Margaret," said Aunt Ann, suddenly, "and Valentine shall see you home as early as you like. You cannot think how low and dull I feel at my lodgings."

"Is not Miss Anstruther with you?" asked Margaret in some surprise.

"Yes—yes!" said Mrs. Daventry in a depressed, tone, "that is it; for you know, Richard ever since Jasper's trial, has seemed an altered man; he has never been used to opposition you know, my dear. Well, since that time, he has paid constant attentions to Julia, and—and since I have seen so much of my brother, and talked so much of serious things to him, I have begun to have a fear: a mother's heart is very quick, you know," she added still more sadly, "a fear that Julia is trying to win his love by encouraging his

faults. All men have their faults, and, of course, Richard is not exempt. I never dreamed of this once; I thought my son was above influence or example, and when I tried so earnestly to throw them together, I thought only of the rental of her Glamorganshire estates, I am afraid, and not of anything else. Now I begin to feel that there are things of greater importance, and that the woman who will condescend to minister to a man's faults, would undermine a very rock in time."

"I am very, very sorry," said Margaret.

"Perhaps I exaggerate a little," said Aunt Ann rallying herself, "because in all courtships you know, third parties are naturally forced to be reflective, because they have no other parts to play, and I am naturally impatient when I am left out of anything, and feel dull when they sit and play chess, or sing together all the evening, taking no more notice of me than enforced politeness requires, and yet it did not make me feel dull

when you and Mr. Travers were so absorbed in each other."

The bright flush passed over Margaret's face, only to leave it deadly pale; but she made no remark, and Aunt Ann went on.

"No, it is not that my son's affection is becoming weaned from me, but because he is not better for the change; a mother can sacrifice even her child's love for his welfare, but, Margaret, it is not well, that is why I am grieved. If you asked me in what, I could scarcely tell you, except, perhaps, in unreasonable anger against Mark. But will you come?"

"Yes!" said Margaret, "and the change may refresh me." She was very grieved for what she heard. Her warning, desperately given as it was, had proved of no avail, so true it is that we most of us work out our own destiny.

It was very soon arranged with Mrs.

Hamilton that Margaret should go to her aunt's lodgings with her for the evening, and having taken an affectionate leave of her father, although her absence was to be for so short a time, she started with her in the carriage, which now regularly came at a certain hour to fetch her from Starborne Street.

Aunt Ann's lodgings in St. James's Square were very comfortable, as were most places in which she located, for any time, however short.

The dining-room and drawing-room were upon the same floor, and were well and comfortably furnished. When they entered the drawing-room, they found Miss Anstruther already attired in a becoming evening dress, waiting for dinner. Her dress was white, and so simply made, that the few costly jewels she wore, looked more costly even than they really were. She came forward to meet Margaret with much warmth of manner, but

there was a cold, unsteady, questioning look in her eyes, as if she wondered why she had come, and dreaded the consequence.

When Margaret had taken off her bonnet and arranged her hair, she still looked so pale and wearied with anxiety and sorrow, that Miss Anstruther might easily gain by the comparison, especially as she had the advantage of complete evening dress, and showed a fair neck and plump round arm richly adorned by its heavy bracelet. As Mrs. Daventry had expressed herself in her musings, there was a shadow over Margaret, veiling her beauty, subduing her sprightliness, making night where there had been so much sunshine. Here, too, the contrast was to Julia's advantage, she was enjoying a little triumph, her love or her art was in the ascendant, and it needed but a few more days or hours to bring Richard to the necessary confession. There could be no more power in the pale face of the unloving Margaret, to

loosen the chain which had been thrown over him, as Aunt Ann tremblingly confessed to herself, for evil and not for good.

He was there when they came in to the drawing-room, standing by Miss Anstruther upon the hearth rug, so close that his arm might have been around her waist. The game she played was good if won; if lost—pshaw! who that talks of losing cares to play. The *tête-à-tête* had evidently been a successful one, for there was a quiet triumph in Miss Anstruther's eyes, which fell not even when Margaret came in like a quiet shadow upon that lighted room. Richard received her coldly, enquiring with civility, yet without the affectation of any particular feeling, for his uncle.

Margaret's lip quivered slightly as she answered him, but Richard in his heart even then bore testimony to the admiration which he felt for the simple, uncompromised dignity

of her bearing, even now while ruin was behind and before her.

Those err who suppose that where a woman does not love she necessarily slights or hates. The knowledge that we are loved must give pleasure and create an interest in the lover, which, if it falls short of attachment, yet assumes a stronger feeling than common acquaintance produces. Thus, mingled with the feeling which had induced Margaret, at all times, to check any warmer sentiments in her cousin, she had ever a strong interest in his happiness. She could not help watching him now with close but furtive attention. Her faculties of mind and imagination were too wearied to enable her to take any thing like a leading, or an easy part in the conversation. She sat there rather like the shadow of the gaiety which they maintained, than as one of themselves, and yet she observed with close and silent interest.

Now that the first effort of meeting was over, Richard seemed to have a feverish pleasure in making her the spectator of his attentions to Miss Anstruther, and Margaret fancied that she detected the fact, that whatever motive had led him first to simulate admiration, it would now be very difficult for him to retrace his steps. If he could have seen how very little her vanity was wounded, and how it was lost altogether in her pity for him, his proud heart would have been greatly troubled; but he could not, and he fancied the cause of her increased depression was that he was lost to her for ever. He knew, and he was angry and discourteous to her because he knew it, that one loving look or relenting word would have recalled him even then, and breaking down all the fences which his anger and pique had erected, that he would gladly have stood by her side now, and smiled at the wreck which was around, but which was no part of her. He knew,

too, that that look or word had not been given, and that his pride and anger were not broken down, but had urged him on with selfish prudence to stand in the way of the many generous schemes which his mother had formed to save her brother and his family, and which wanted but his consent to be made effective.

Worldly as Mrs. Daventry had systematically been, she had as often without system been unworldly; and in her love for her son both natures had been strangely combined. Foolish as it often had been, injudicious as it certainly was, her fondness for him was deep and sincere, and Margaret saw with pain that this affection was wounded now. Mrs. Daventry was evidently unhappy, although one of the brightest of her worldly dreams seemed close upon fulfilment. Was it because Miss Anstruther was so absorbed in her almost completed conquest, as to forget the lookers on, and that the keen shrewd

wit of Aunt Ann, no longer blinded by the dust which she had so studiously thrown in her own eyes, perceived but too late, that she was cat-like, subtle and wily; but more than all else, cold and selfish

Margaret went home that night, with her heart full of pity for the man who was foolish enough to be swayed by pique into so solemn a purpose; but severely blaming herself all the time for the almost shrinking dislike she was beginning to feel for Miss Anstruther. It had so little foundation, and was in itself so wilful and capricious; but still it was there, and went home with her in her solitary drive from the fashionable locality to the unknown retirement of Starborne Street.

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. Hamilton's consent to his daughter's engagement had been given lingeringly and doubtfully, it is true; but still given.

Alice had been summoned to meet him alone, and it was then, perhaps, for the first time that he discovered the full power of will, which dwelt in her strong purposes. She had weighed everything long before it was suggested to her, and determinately, but respectfully, she held her own way.

And so it fell into the common order of things in Starborne Street, that Mr. Smith's visit should come daily as a matter of course.

It was a fact against which there was no use in struggling now, and Margaret determined to make the best of it. It came, however, as a strange episode in the midst of so much grief for the past, and anxiety for the future—this love making.

She watched Alice constantly, to see whether her purpose fluctuated, or her faith in the future failed; and gladly would she have put aside the suspicion, that her sister was selling herself for this world's provision; but she could not.

Trying to make the best of it, she would sometimes have a little conversation with him, while, perhaps, Alice was putting on, or taking off her bonnet, hoping to find the rich ore which might have won the young girl's heart. Nor was Mr. Smith at all loath to assume the

brother's part; although he seemed to look upon Margaret, as one whose heart had been ensnared by her own beauty, and who had been hopelessly entangled by the follies and vanities of a world, upon which he looked down as from a superior height.

Mr. Smith was the son of vulgar but ambitious parents, whose chief wish from the very infancy of their only child, had been to get him into the church. A very considerable portion of their income had been expended upon this object, and no sacrifice had been spared which might help the great end of their wishes, which was to make "Andrew a gentleman."

It is difficult, however, to do away with the influences of home, even in the most refined of seminaries; and the "shop" attached itself to young Smith with defiant obstinacy. The more he battled with it and beat it down, the stronger it rose to dog his steps and laugh at his gentility. Low

birth is a disadvantage easily dealt with by true worth, but it severely tests all that falls short of it.

This was the case with poor Smith. At school, his young companions discovered his foible, and scented with the quickness of blood-hounds, the secret gibbet upon which his pride was daily hung. His school-fellows went with him to Oxford, and the secret went with them as a matter of course. It could not in a country so happily free to all as England, have hurt him much, had he not helped to make himself ridiculous by his insupportable pride, which was for ever exacting and suspicious, making little things of consequence by his mode of treating them.

Even then, men did not cut him, they were only "shy" of him as a "low fellow;" but this hurt him still more, he could have borne persecution, but he writhed under patronage. He never, however, attempted to consider that

it was just possible that the fault lay in himself, and that the vulgar pride which so strongly marked his character, might be more to blame than the station from which he was endeavouring very laudably to rise, and which he designated justly enough as no fault of his.

He forgot how so many of our truly great men, have made their low extraction but a shadow, to emblazon forth their honour in bolder relief. He saw that it stood as a disadvantage to him, and he accepted the disadvantage with a bitter hatred, which the succeeding events of his life only served to increase. The death of his father, and a consequent failure of income, recalled him from Oxford before his terms were completed, and with some vague hope of being able to continue them at some future time, he resigned himself to this calamity, and with praiseworthy industry opened a school for young boys in Islington.

For this he was eminently fitted, and his school room became a popular one. Here he brought home his mother, and nourished her with a care which did him honour. Unfortunately, she was neither calculated to raise him in social position, nor to allay the feverish pride which her early teaching had imparted. His love for her was, however, a most redeeming trait in his character, and it did not go unrewarded, it gave confidence in him, and his school increased.

She had now been dead some years. The school prospered sufficiently to provide bed and board, but not fortune; and Oxford and the uncompleted terms had long since become as a reminiscence of the past. Mr. Smith was too wise to resign a substance for a shadow, however tempting, and he therefore prudently confined his energies to keeping his school together, and supporting his position in the neighbourhood as much as

There was, unhappily, nothing in the life he now led, to ameliorate the rebellious passions of his nature. A monarch at home, he was abroad but a "low fellow" after all his strivings. The school added to the "shop," served to make him dogmatic as well as suspicious, and his feelings being so perpetually upon the watch for offence, could not fail to find it sometimes. Having found an offence, he loved to nurse and exaggerate it, and make much of it, as an excuse for the hatred towards the rich and the well born which grew with him year by year, until it became not so much a passion as a part of his very nature.

If he could have taken his part in good society, there is little difficulty in surmising that he would have ceased to despise it; but as he could not, he sought to bring it down to his own level by contempt; mixed with this feeling, forming a part of it, and, perhaps, even originating it, was a strong craving for distinction, a craving which generally

finds a real, or a morbid means for its gratification.

But how? He was a clever man amongst boys, but this could not give him distinction amongst men; he was not original in idea, nor did he, in himself, possess any claim to distinction. If found, therefore, it must be sought for from without, rather than from within. He looked abroad, and found the means in the unhappy divisions which at all times distract the church, and which were particularly rife at the time when he sat waiting for "the tide" which was to bear him on to fortune. He considered for a time the difference of parties, and then, perhaps because his prejudices the more readily fell into them, he adopted the very ultra views of the extreme low church party. To say that he adopted them insincerely, would be to do him great injustice. But he took them up only as some men take up politics, or science, or speculation, as hotly, as determinately and as obstinately;

but his "opinions" had as little to do with the heart as any of these. They were "opinions," a slip of the pen has given them the right name, they were strong, dogmatic, argumentative "opinions," but not sentiments or feelings. They reigned in his mind, but they possessed no vivifying, or sweetening, or softening influence for his soul. They made him rigid in practice, hard in morals, and cruel in judgment.

They quenched any remaining gaiety of disposition which might have belonged to him, and made him see sin where others find only flowers and sunshine. Affecting to despise all ceremonial observances, he yet set himself up for the idol of his own shrine.

It always must be unfair to compare one man with another, and Margaret knew it was so, when she compared this man's religion with that of Mr. Travers. And yet they were both representative men; in the one, religion became a part of himself, giving a majesty

to his whole being, and a power to his individuality; it made the other as unworthy as he affected to believe himself, because we may not use heavenly things for our own purposes, or lightly touch that which is most holy.

Seeing this, with the keen, intuitive perception natural to her, Margaret wondered how Alice, in the first flush of youth and hope, should voluntarily pledge herself to marry Mr. Smith.

Gently, very gently, and yet with the power and strength which love possesses, she ventured to say this to Alice, one night, when they were seated in the elder sister's room for a chat. Each girl had her hair unfastened, and falling unrestrainedly; it was an hour when, if at all, it is possible, to be confidential.

"You forget," said Alice, stopping the hand which had been restlessly combing down her girlish tresses, and looking up with

an expression of excited bitterness, "that I know nothing of the flush of youth. You do. When you came out, it was very different, no girl could have stood in a better position, courted, flattered, and caressed, with your horse to ride, and your harp to play, and your every wish granted, with money enough to gratify even your whims. You have tasted life, and know what youth means. I can understand how, even when steeped in poverty and ruined as we are, you can wonder that I can choose to marry a schoolmaster. But it is very different with me, I can understand but not feel your feelings, prejudices rather. They do not apply to me, I have grown old without tasting the pleasures which you appreciate, though they exist no longer. Yes, old, Margaret, although only just nineteen. Your pity is thrown away. I sometimes look upon myself as selfish in leaving the sinking ship, but for

myself I rejoice to find a chance of rescue. I am very grateful to Mr. Smith, and I daresay I shall remain so. If you ask me to say more than that, I must decline, for I believe I am incapable of receiving or inspiring a romantic affection."

"You think so now, but you are so young, too young to know."

"Too young!" laughed Alice, bitterly, "no one is young who has lived two such years as we have lived in Starborne Street."

"Ah, Alice! may there not be other trials equally hard?"

"There may; but I will not think so," said Alice, "or I should lie down and die!"

"You, Alice! and you never uttered a complaint."

"No," said Alice, quietly, "there was no use in complaining, but now that the remedy presents itself, I take it."

"Dear Alice, may you be happy, and never repent your choice."

What more could be said? It was clear Margaret must make the best of it.

CHAPTER V.

THE Michaelmas holidays were fast approaching, and it seemed difficult to find room in the domestic councils of Starborne Street, for any other topic than that of Alice's coming marriage.

Even Margaret caught the infection, and almost believed in the necessity of setting aside for a week or two, the momentous question of their future maintenance. Aunt Ann urged her to do so, and in a hundred little ways put her purse at the disposal of

the family; and so it seemed impossible to refuse her request, that a breathing time, at least, should be allowed, time enough for Mr. Hamilton to rally his strength, and for Alice to be married, before the family pledged themselves to any decided plan for the future.

Aunt Ann had declared that there were many things to be repented of at leisure besides hasty marriages; and in the meanwhile, enforced her opinion by stocking the larder with fish, flesh, and fowl, and bringing such plenty as had not been known in the house, since the Hamiltons had taken possession of it.

It was, indeed, a kind of interregnum between riches and poverty, sufficient to give time for thought, but not to relieve it of its many anxious bearings.

Margaret knew well how little any such unlooked-for plenty could be depended upon, and wished very much that something

had been decided on, and yet thoughts of Alice engrossed her enough to make even that future, about which she was so anxious, but a secondary consideration. From any scheme which they might form, let it be ever so rash or ill-judged, there might still remain an appeal, but from Alice's marriage there would be none.

No one could be more keenly alive to the falsehood with which Alice was dealing by herself; but she saw this as those see whose eyes are dimmed by love. She questioned herself—could she have helped it? Could she have done more, suffered more, and helped more? Had she failed in love or patience? Could she more have softened her sister's lot?

Oh, no! And yet, so regretting, it cannot be told how these thoughts quickened her love for Alice. How she watched her, and comforted her with all the pity which sprang from her noble heart. It

was a relief to have in her hands some needle-work for her service, to rise early to begin some needful garment, and to sit up late to finish it.

It was surprising how rapidly she worked, and how cleverly she contrived. One would have thought she was glad of this marriage, had not the large, slow tears which fell sometimes upon her active fingers contradicted the idea.

Aunt Ann would have carried out her intention of presenting Alice with the handsomest dress her purse could procure, but every other extravagant arrangement with regard to the ceremony Margaret managed to set aside.

"Give her what you like," she had said, "but let her marriage itself be in keeping with our circumstances."

And so, Alice was to be married quietly. Aunt Ann's greatest delight was in purchasing for her, sometimes useful,

and sometimes most inappropriate presents. This was very much to Mr. Smith's satisfaction, he not being, of course, cognizant of the inward exultation with which Aunt Ann so often exclaimed to herself,

"She will be provided for, and I must then think of the others."

One evening, Margaret and Alice were sitting together, the former busily working with her rapid fingers, while Alice fitted on Aunt Ann's last present, a pair of white satin slippers. She had taken some little time to unlace her boot, for the lace was broken and had a knot in it. At length, she was able to look down with satisfaction upon her right foot, now transformed and beautified by the neatly fitting shoe.

"Look, Margaret," she said gaily, "see the contrast;" and she placed one foot by the side of the other. The old boot suffered by the comparison, certainly. It had been

originally bought at the cheapest shop in all Islington, (in itself a matter of trial to one accustomed from infancy to the most expensive establishments of Regent Street,) and the date of its purchase, also, must have been remote, for it was pieced and darned in many places, and because it was scarcely worth while to mend it again now, it was splitting everywhere, and giving way at every seam.

"Look, Margaret, do you wonder at me? this," she said, coquettishly pointing to the satin slipper, "this, is marriage, and this is Starborne Street."

"Alice, dear Alice," Margaret said standing by her, and drawing her close in her loving embrace, "dear Alice!"

It was all she had the power to say, but there was so much love and so much pity in her accents, that Alice felt shame creeping to her heart. Escaping from her embrace, however, she said in her usual

business manner, that the man was waiting for the shoes, and she must make haste; and Margaret took up her needle, and worked faster than before, but there was a tear upon the dark lash that swept over her downcast eyes.

No, it was no use staying the evil hour; one day followed another in rapid succession. Mr. Smith paid his daily visits, and every time Margaret tried to like him better and failed, and every day brought the Michaelmas holidays nearer, and perfected some necessary arrangement. Mr. Hamilton tried to rouse himself, to welcome the event, and to shew the gratitude, which he really felt, to Mr. Smith, for taking his portionless daughter.

He had debated and scrupled a little at first, but now he felt, in his humility, glad that one, at least, was, as his sister expressed it, "provided for."

Aunt Ann remained late every afternoon, and came early; but no persuasion could induce her to prolong her visits beyond the time when business men might be supposed to return from the city, but she did not again speak of Richard, although Margaret fancied that when silent, she looked more than usually thoughtful.

The wedding was to be strictly private. Which of their old or new friends would be likely to come to Starborne Street, except to criticise or to pity? Mr. Smith desired no company. He might conscientiously say that he was above such vanities, and, therefore, the wedding was to be strictly private.

It came at last. A bright September morning, when even the Lower Road looked clean, and the dust upon Islington Green bore a faint resemblance to grass, was Alice's marriage day. She was cool

and collected to the last, and except from her dress, no one would have marked her out as being the bride.

The marriage took place in the church, which we have said, served to Mark as a landmark by which he found his way from the Lower Road down still lower to Starborne Street. Margaret had contrived that so little in the way of display should be attempted, that any failure in the arrangements was almost an impossibility. But there was more difficulty in managing the breakfast, which, because it was so strictly private, should have been the more snug and sociable. But Mark had a strong internal objection to the marriage, and he and Mr. Smith, decidedly, could not 'get on' together. There were the elements of disagreement in their very natures, which required all Mark's good temper and judgment to suppress, and he was more open to irritation lately, than he had ever been before.

Mr. Smith had determined upon spending the few leisure days he could command at Tottenham, and the near neighbourhood of this locality prevented the necessity of hurrying off early. Under some circumstances, it is peculiarly trying to drag out the hours of parting, and even the charm of his wedding-day could not prevent the society of Mr. Smith being heavy.

Margaret could not help wondering whether Alice thought so too, or, if not, whether she would ever wake to the discovery.

Aunt Ann had offered her carriage for the service of the bride and bridegroom that day; and it was a relief, a painful one, but still a relief, when it came to the door, ready to take them to the station. Mrs. Daventry had proposed sending it with them to Tottenham, but Mr. Smith feared that the sight of the pair of greys would effectually rouse the rapacity of the landlady of the lodgings

he had secured, and so he had chosen the safer incognito of the railway.

"If it had been from our old home that I was going," said Alice, as she stood at the glass to arrange her pretty pink silk bonnet, attended by her two sisters, "what pain there would be in parting! Now I can but wish that you may both soon be able to follow my example."

"Show us how happy you are when you come back," said Olivia, "and we shall do well enough. Perhaps I have been too buried in books; but, somehow, I have found a great deal to enjoy here, and shall be very sorry when we must leave."

Margaret said nothing, she only stood there watching Alice with a deeply-troubled, but loving look, as she gave her, one by one, the articles of her dress, as she needed them, which the younger sister received as

a kind of natural tribute to the precedence she had attained, and which needed no thanks.

She went alone to take leave of her father; and, when she returned from him, she held her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Poor papa!" she murmured, "what a wreck of himself he is."

She recovered herself quickly as she passed down the narrow staircase, being very careful to go first.

Mrs. Hamilton was crying now, but looking with an eye of pride upon the new habiliments and the pink silk bonnet with which her daughter was arrayed.

Mr. Smith looked at the pink bonnet as if it were a fugitive sin; but this covered a really affectionate look at his bride, which comforted Margaret all the day afterwards.

There was a little bustle, and the leave-

taking; and then Alice was bowing from the window, "as if," as Aunt Ann said, "the carriage were her own, dear little soul!"

And, then, bride and bridegroom being gone, the whole family began to have a dim perception of an impression that there had been a funeral in the house. Mrs. Hamilton talked a great deal about her 'poor child;' and Aunt Ann stole away to have a quiet talk with her brother, to advise him more fully of the advantages of the Smith connection, and to glean from him some ray of comfort which might throw light on the dark corners which the false glare of the world had left in her heart.

Margaret went to put away the little signs of Alice's presence, which would be but painful now, and to weep unrestrainedly at the sight of the old boots and discarded bonnet, with its poor faded ribbon, and to pray that if these had influenced Alice in her choice, the sin might be forgiven.

Still the feeling of the funeral was strong

in the house, and truly marriage is like death, it is a bar, which passed, can never be repassed again. It is a death to girlhood; and its duties fulfilled, or left undone, are as past things now.

The child and sister may love as strongly, as devotedly as ever, but her home is elsewhere; what she has been in the deep and intimate relationship of this home, she can here be never more again.

Happy is she who can pass from her father's door, bearing no reproachful conscience, who can look back upon the past as upon an account, faithfully closed, who leaves behind her such deep regret that she could not but have been a source of happiness there, and who bears to her new home the blessings of her old one, as an earnest of the new life upon which she has entered. "Was it so with you, Alice?"

But Margaret was not sitting in judgment,

as she put away the poor old faded bonnet, she was thinking of the long life its former owner might have before her; of—Mr. Smith. She forgot that she was not Mrs. Smith, and that to her he might be a very different personage. She hoped he was.

To remove the impression of the funeral, she went out for a walk with Mark after tea; for breakfast had served for dinner, and they took tea early.

There is one pretty walk leading to the Upper Road by the New River, which is planted with evergreens and weeping willows. They took this way by Margaret's snggestion, and as they walked, they fell into conversation about love and marriage, naturally enough, after the event of the day. It was then, for the first time, when the shadows began to fall, that Mark spoke of his regard for Kate Lyndhurst, and of the way in which he had set it aside as a thing past and done with. Margaret sadly

listened; it was one more drop in the full cup of sorrow. Had he done right? he asked. Judging wholly for him, being proud for him, Margaret answered, yes! but then she said, "poor Kate."

"Fortune may change," she said, "you may grow rich, and no one who has once loved could forget you."

"I only spoke of myself," said Mark gravely.

"No, no, I know that! but if she loves— Oh, Mark! we must think of her—if she loves!"

Margaret spoke from her heart, her own deep seated grief made her most pitiful and kind.

Mark looked uneasy. "I have thought of that," he said, "but I see no help for it. If she loves me, there is still no reason why I should make her cease to respect me. As it is, it is better that she should believe that the accidental necessities of Jasper's trial

alone took me to her uncle's house so frequently, and so, that being over, learn to forget me."

"This sudden withdrawal, however," said Margaret, "must seem like caprice."

"I cannot trust myself in her company, now that I know myself; and suspect that I know her."

"It is very hard to say what course is right," said Margaret gently.

"I know," said Mark firmly, "that it would be wrong for me to come forward in my present circumstances. If she were poor, it would be another matter; but she is rich, and I never will be charged with interested motives. If I were simply poor, but possessing a profession, it would be another matter; but I could not live in plenty while my father may want the very necessaries of life, and I could not nourish him with my wife's fortune. No, we must not talk of it again; but I feel that it will be a

relief to me to know that you understand me. If I seem sometimes depressed, you will know why, and will make allowances for me."

"I shall not need to do so," replied Margaret, "you will act up to yourself in this as in everything else. I have never had any need but to be proud of you all my life."

"I wish I could feel so, too," said Mark smiling; "but I am very desponding sometimes."

"It is a long lane which has no turning, remember," said Margaret hopefully.

"Yes, that is true! yet the lane we are in is a very long one."

"I have been reading a great deal of biography in the last few months," said Margaret, "and nothing has struck me more than the severity of the early struggles of so many great men. Seeing them as they stand in history, we are so apt to forget the

steps which led to their greatness; and yet these steps are so uniform in trial, that trial must be necessary, perhaps particularly necessary to clever men who might become too arrogant, if they were not softened by sorrow."

"Yes; but these were great men, and not at all cases in point."

"I think they are," said Margaret, "through all our trials you have never shewn a distrust of yourself until now."

"Love opens one's eyes," said Mark, smiling at her earnestness.

"Love makes one blind," insisted Margaret. "And now, for Kate Lyndhurst's sake, you will fight more bravely than ever."

"Why for her sake? I have given her up."

"Not for ever; and I should recommend a middle course. There can be no harm in visiting occasionally at the house, setting a strict guard upon yourself; for, take my word for

it, your fortune is changing already, and then what happiness for her and for you. I thought you were right just now, but I begin to think you are not at all so. I shall take the burden of the home housekeeping upon myself, and after a year or two, more than your occasional help may not be needed; and if such a man as you came to woo me, I would wait twenty years for him, rather than that he should change or cease to care for me."

Mark fell into a fit of musing. From his earnest self-martyrdom, he had been anxious to make no selfish reservation, but Margaret had awakened a different train of thought. It might be just possible that Kate and Margaret thought alike, and then—why it might not be so very wrong to accept the invitation to dinner from Mr. Lyndhurst, then lying unanswered upon his desk at his chambers.

They returned home, for their walk had been so lengthened, that it was getting dark

and chilly; and Mrs. Hamilton was looking out for them, with some vague impression of insecurity in Margaret's absence.

Aunt Ann being no longer by to check the conversation, and the excuse of Alice's marriage being passed, it naturally fell upon the future; and it was then agreed that when a day or two of rest had intervened, Margaret should carry out her resolution of calling upon some of their old friends, and make a bold attempt to obtain the support necessary for her scheme.

Margaret spoke cheerfully and hopefully, trying to inspirit Mark, and to support her mother. How easy to one of her sanguine temperament and daring disposition, would have been the difficulties she was about to encounter, had she not had to conceal a grief, which, like the hidden fox of the Spartan boy, gnawed at the very life within her.

It was concealed, however, and when Mark caught the bright glance of her eyes as she

wished him good night, he mistook the fever flash for genuine enthusiasm, and carried home with him a more hopeful spirit than he had known for weeks past.

CHAPTER VI.

"AND how will you go, my poor darling, to visit these rich friends of ours?" said Aunt Ann, the following day.

"In your carriage, dear aunt," said Margaret, looking up from the paper upon which she had been making some rapid calculations, with a bright hopeful look of promise which told at once that all former difficulties and failures were forgotten, the very greatness of the present emergency awakening all her energy.

"In your carriage, dear aunt, with your coachman and footman; and yourself, too, if you feel so disposed. Do you think my residence here has so dulled my remembrance of the inhabitants of the fashionable world, as to make me believe that I could touch their sympathies in a better way. Did you suppose that I was going to walk to their doors, to shew how poor and humbled their former equal had become, and how needing their charitable kindness and help? Oh, no!" she added, laughing, "one may tell people as much of one's poverty as one likes, but never let them see it. The tale is touching and romantic, but the sight is vulgar."

"What a clever girl you are, my dear, and you to keep a school!" said her aunt, sighing.

"Aye! if fortune will so far favour me; and glory in the act. Think of papa! to see him in comfort would be worth a life's sacrifice, and what right have we even to

mention the word sacrifice, when we shall be so thankful to earn our daily bread."

"What a noble girl this is," sighed Aunt Ann, to herself, "while I have spent all my ready money upon travelling and toys, and am forced to borrow of Richard."

That was one of the secret cares which made her so often silent and depressed. She could do nothing for her brother beyond promises, without Richard's consent, for she had deeply forestalled her income; and thus, although possessed of a liberal jointure, her reckless prodigality was now, as ever, the enemy of her best intentions. She was indebted to her son, and thus very much dependent upon his advice, which advice, after his double failure in love and law, certainly did not lie in favour of liberality towards her brother and his family. Bitterly was she now repenting her spendthrift habits; but she found they were indeed

habits, and very difficult to rule or set aside, in spite of her most earnest wish to serve.

How little some people ever guess how poor the rich sometimes are!

Under the impression of this regret, Aunt Ann was rejoiced to find that she had something really to give.

The horses and carriage were declared Margaret's for the next few days, only Mrs. Daventry stipulated that they should take her in the morning to Starborne Street, and be there again in time to take her home to dinner. It was a comfort to her to see, when the day fixed for her first trial came, how well Margaret looked in the new bonnet and dress she had worn at the wedding; how perfectly the gentlewoman in her bearing. It seemed as if it would be easy for Margaret to do many things, but to lay aside her native dignity, never. But there was, beyond this, the expectation of success, and the deter-

mination to grapple with fortune, and to conquer, which had given a brilliancy to her eyes, and restored the rose to her pale cheek.

Who has not shared her mood? All those who have battled with fortune, and have gallantly lost, have gone forth with the confident expectation of success. Alas, and alas! for the noble hearts who find in disappointment the tomb of their hopes!

Aunt Ann listened all the afternoon for the sound of the returning wheels, partly because Margaret had infused into her some of her own confidence, and partly because she loved gossip with all her heart; but more because, if this scheme failed, she must have a talk with Richard, not the quiet chat she delighted in, but something very different, a money talk with Richard's business face upon a subject about which he was certain to be angry, and she as certain to be cowed and dissatisfied.

It came, at length, the roll and rattle of her carriage down the short street, punctual to the hour appointed; but how weary was the air with which Margaret ascended the steps, and how languid was her smile when Aunt Ann questioned her with tactless haste!

"I shall do better to-morrow," was her quiet answer to her shower of questions; and what a world of present disappointment was contained in those few words.

She rallied when she had taken a cup of tea; and, half in bitterness, half in merriment, she gave the detail of that day's failure amongst her titled friends.

"I did not think the world was half so bad!" cried Aunt Ann; and, considering the ardent worship she had given to it all her life, it would have been surprising if she had.

"Do not blame the world, dear aunt," said Margaret, in the same half-mocking tone in which she had been speaking; for

she had, in truth, been hardly tried that day, "it is such a hopeless way of getting out of difficulties. It is a remarkably good and accommodating world, only there are so many vexatious people in it. But," she added, becoming grave of a sudden, "it has been our own fault. Had I attempted this two years ago, it must have succeeded; but now, why London is so full of fresh disasters that our failure is as if it had taken place in another century, and, besides all that, we have turned our backs upon our acquaintances until they have forgotten us. We shook hands as it were with all our old friends, when we left the West End. Dear papa! if he could but have borne a little patronage then, I believe he would find help now. No one who is not quite independent of the world should retire from it, since it forgets so easily."

"It is a cold, cruel world!" said Aunt Ann, musing over her idol.

"It is kind and generous in a thousand instances," said Margaret; "this is our own fault now; but I shall try again to-morrow. I have been unfortunate in my choice of friends to-day."

"Friends!" echoed Fred, with a doubting sneer.

"Yes, yès!" said Margaret, turning to him, hastily and apprehensively, "whatever other error you may commit, Fred, do not treat the world as an enemy, or you will be certain to make it one."

"Well, my love," said Annt Ann, drawing on her gloves, preparatory to departing, "I shall hate it for your sake."

"If you ever hated anything, which I am certain you never did," said Margaret, going with her to the door, and pressing her hand with such renewed hope, that she was half contented to postpone her threatened excommunication of the

world until to-morrow; for, was it not, after all, her world, the world for which she had lived, whose smiles had delighted her, whose follies had amused her, and in whose extravagancies she had involved herself? She would give it a second trial, and hate it, if necessary, to-morrow.

Margaret went out, upon her second day's attempt, with a firm step and a steady heart, but there was no bright flash of the eye, or brilliant colour in her cheek. If the world was to be won by firmness and dignity, she would win it; but it was a capricious, uncertain world of fashionable opinion, to which she had to trust herself; and she returned again disappointed.

She had by this time visited her most influential friends, and had found discouragement, distant promises, or such luke-warm help as could not justify her in attempting anything requiring so large an outlay, and involving so great a risk.

The third day's canvass might, indeed,

recover the failure of the other two; but it was with but faint hopes and failing expectations that Margaret went forth to make the attempt. It was the dull season in London, and she had had to encounter much difficulty upon that account, still, she believed that she had made a fair trial, and this had proved a failure.

Wearily she turned homewards, and yet reluctantly, when she thought of having to tell her own convictions, not from pride, ashamed to own that she had been in error, but because her buoyant spirit had alone held back the desolation and ruin which was closing round her family; and to bring to them her own strong feeling of overwhelming despair seemed, to her, terrible indeed.

"What time will you want us to-morrow, ma'am?" enquired Valentine, as he opened the carriage door when they stopped in Starborne Street.

"I shall not want you again, thank you,"

said Margaret, struggling to hide her tears as she went in, and Valentine took his seat by the coachman on the box, evidently far from elated in spirits.

"Times are sadly altered," observed he, "since Miss Hamilton's horse was the finest in all the ring at Hyde Park."

"I am so tired," said Margaret as she came into the little drawing room, where Aunt Ann was alone waiting for her; "and so thirsty, Mary," she said faintly, "bring me if you please a little milk and water."

"Milk and water!" said Mrs. Daventry, "there's wine down stairs, I brought some yesterday."

"No, no, Mary," said Margaret, "we must keep that," and Mary departed; returning presently with the milk and water, Margaret raised the glass to her parched lips and drank it eagerly.

Aunt Ann watched her uneasily, she saw that there was no repose in her manner,

nothing but an uneasy shifting off of the flood of grief which sooner or later would burst forth.

"Come and sit down and rest yourself, darling, and tell me all about it presently," said Aunt Ann tenderly.

Margaret was standing by the table holding her bonnet in her hand. She laid it down slowly, still struggling with her tears, then walking to her aunt she was about to sit beside her; but as if yielding in that moment to the full conviction of her sorrow, she threw herself upon the floor beside her, and with her arm cast despairingly upon her lap, she let her head sink upon it, while the tears which would no longer be subdued, burst from her with convulsive sobs.

"My darling! my darling!" cried Aunt Ann, terrified to see her upon whom all relied, so utterly cast down; and Margaret heard even in the midst of her grief, and hushed her sobs, and cried silently and quietly,

still with her head bent down, still with her face covered, but so silently that Mrs. Daventry bent her head to listen to her breathing, fearing she had fainted.

It was a strange friendship, but a very strong one nevertheless, which had grown up between these very dissimilar characters, and trouble was helping to unite them still closer. The stronger character, too, was absorbing the weaker one. Aunt Ann's heart was becoming purer by the contact; and now no greater sign of her sympathy could, perhaps, have been given than the perfect silence she preserved until Margaret spoke again.

This was only when, presently, her mother entered, and then Margaret rallied instantly, and tried to be composed, though she spoke despairingly.

"It is all over, dear mother. The Campbells have sent their children to Brighton, and my chief hope was of them.

I have not had the promise of a single pupil; and so we must think of something else. Poor Mark!" she added under her breath.

Mrs. Hamilton sat down in the arm chair, and put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Do not cry, dear mamma," said Margaret, rising and going to her, and putting her arm so affectionately round her neck, "I can bear any thing but that."

"And you'll have to bear, too. I can tell you," said Mrs. Hamilton peevishly. "*You* do not know what want means, how should you know, brought up in the lap of luxury?"

Margaret might have cited the two long years of apprenticeship which she had borne; but she did not. She only kissed her gently and whispered, that all their care was for her and their father.

Meanwhile, the horses waited impatiently

at the door, and Mrs. Daventry reluctantly put on her bonnet, and wished them good bye.

"Take heart, darling!" whispered she to Margaret, "and hope, at least, until to-morrow."

Margaret kissed her affectionately, but could not obey her injunction. It seemed then impossible to hope, every energy was crushed and depressed, evil fortune followed them like a curse. She bowed her head beneath the stroke; but she could not hope. A cold despair was battling for its place in her heart, and though she still recoiled from it, she felt that she could fight no more.

CHAPTER VII.

AUNT ANN speeded home as fast as excitement and determination could urge her. She was fully occupied with the scene in which she had taken part, and, although it required a great stimulus to force her into a business like talk with Richard, she seemed bent upon that purpose now.

She was a little chilled and a little fretted, besides, to find that he was there before her; and that Miss Anstruther had been entertaining him, for how long, she had no means of ascertaining. Julia was

dressed in her peculiarly becoming white muslin, which, although it might have answered the purposes of full dress, looked simple enough for the occasion. Mrs. Daventry was annoyed with both of them, she could scarcely tell why, particularly as she knew that she was half an hour later than usual, and that Richard might reasonably have expected to find her at home.

She dressed herself as quickly as she could, and came down in a great hurry, under the pretence of fearing that the fish would be spoiled.

She hurried over the dinner too, in a manner which was very unusual to her, for she lounged over every act of her life, unless urged by some strong feeling, as she was now, and her present determination was, that she would have a talk with Richard that night, let whatever might stand in the way.

Richard was paring an apple for Miss Anstruther, in the slowest and most deliberate manner. Aunt Ann, who longed to be able to say, "my dear, will you—" and hand her out of the room, watched him impatiently. Would he never finish paring, with that abstracted air of his, which told that he was thinking, only, of the white muslin and its wearer.

When the apple was transferred to Miss Anstruther's plate, the process of eating it seemed equally difficult and tedious; and Aunt Ann became so nervous and excitable while watching it, that it would have been a great relief to her had the laws of society permitted her to make some open demonstration of her impatience. But this was impossible, and she was forced to content herself with sitting at the head of her table in silence, and showing her weariness in a negative manner.

At last, her waiting was rewarded, and

she accompanied Miss Anstruther to the drawing-room. Leaving her there, she returned immediately, for Richard had fallen into the habit of following them almost immediately, being a man of abstemious habits, and little accustomed to lounge over his wine.

He was still sitting where they had left him; but when his mother entered, a slight shade of annoyance crossed his countenance, and he rose as if about to leave the table.

"Sit down, Richard," said his mother in rather an irritated tone, "for I must have some talk with you."

Richard obeyed, and as if to make the intended conversation less tedious, he took up another apple, and began to pare it as steadily as before, but in perfect silence.

"You never ask me what they are doing in Starborne Street. Your new friends make you forget your old ones."

"You forget," said Richard, coldly,

"how anxious you were that I should forget my old friends; and my new ones, as you call them, are of your own choosing. If you allude to my attentions to Miss Anstruther, you must be strangely forgetful, or capricious, if you do not remember the anxiety you felt at Hastings to throw us together. It is difficult to please you, mother."

Mrs. Daventry winced, but she returned to the charge valiantly.

"You paid as little attention to my wishes then, as you do to my evident disapprobation now."

"Disapprobation!" said Richard now looking up with unfeigned astonishmment, "of the 'heiress' to whom you introduced me, as to such an 'eligible acquaintance;' you know what you meant by the words."

"I do not like her now, why I cannot tell," said his mother almost sullenly.

"I am sorry," said Richard looking up

as if he would say 'take care.' "I am sorry that this expression of your opinion comes too late. I have this afternoon engaged myself to Miss Anstruther. She is sincerely attached to me; and will, I believe, make you a good daughter. She deserves every kindness at your hands."

Mrs. Daventry held in her breath. She had, when necessary, on an emergency like the present, sufficient common sense to teach her to control the too ready expression of her thoughts. She did not like the match now; but Richard had spoken even less than the whole truth, when he had said that she had brought them together. She remembered Margaret's warning, and could have cried with vexation over the success of her own schemes; but she would not cry. She loved her son deeply and sincerely, and she knew how he hated scenes. She said to herself, 'nothing I say to-night shall endanger the peace which

has always existed between us, and which is so valuable to me. Julia will estrange him from me; but it shall be her doing not mine.'

Then she spoke aloud:

"I cannot recall what I have said," she observed with simple dignity, "but I trust very much that any feeling of indiffereuce towards her has arisen only from that jealousy of your affection which is common to mothers. I wish you every happines from my heart. You have been a good son to me, and deserve a parent's blessing. I hope you have chosen wisely, and will secure your happiness in a good wife."

She paused, overcome by her feelings, while Richard apparently unmoved, but in reality very much so, went on paring his apple.

Mrs. Daventry remembered how exceedingly indefinite hēr causes of dislike for Miss Anstruther really were, and made a

strong resolution to subdue it. Now that what she termed the worst was come to the worst, so flexible a mind as hers was the one calculated to make the very best of it.

Richard, meanwhile, knowing that he had made his intended disclosure in an ungracious manner, or rather that he had not made it at all, but had suffered it to be drawn from him, and feeling very much in the wrong, took refuge in a sullen fit, from which his indulgent mother was expected to rally him.

But she was in no mood for this, she was thoughtful and oppressed. It has been all my silly doing, and all against Margaret's advice. Oh! if I had not been so foolish as to fancy that she, like every one else, had a double motive for her advice, how much less I should have to regret now. But this is too late, Richard's happiness,

above all things, must be thought of, and all the more because I have had such a meddlesome hand, in what I fear is it sun-doing. Whatever wife he has, be she a very thorn to me, it shall never make a quarrel between us, never—that would not make him happier, poor fellow! Then she remembered what she had come to talk about, and after a rather lengthened silence, she spoke again.

"You must not think I feel the less about what you have told me, Richard, if I start a different subject; but I must go back to Starborne Street. Things are going on very badly there. Margaret has been trying to start a school, hoping for patronage amongst her old friends; but these have other engagements for their children it seems; and, in truth, the bank failure took place too long ago to excite sympathy now. It is forgotten, and of no more value

than those cheques upon the bank, which I keep more as a curiosity than anything else. She cannot afford to speculate without a greater chance of success, and therefore that scheme fails. I left her just now almost broken hearted. You know, Richard," she added, her eyes filling with sudden tears, "that, after you, no one is so dear to me as Margaret."

Richard looked up with sudden energy; there was a flush of colour on his cheek, and a flashing in his eyes, and a deeply-troubled look over his whole countenance, which went straight to his mother's heart, and was long remembered there.

He looked as if about to speak angry, piteous words, but he restrained himself; and what he said was below his breath, and could not reach her, though she listened hard to hear.

"Richard, I want advice," she said, after awhile; "what can I do for them?"

"Give them whatever you can spare from yourself."

"Yes! but that would be almsgiving, and I want to do more, and to do it better. When my brother could work, such help did very well; but must not content me now. I wish you could see him. The use of one side is entirely gone, and he has not yet been moved from his bed, whether he ever will again is doubtful, of course; but the fact that he will never work again, poor fellow, is not doubtful. Now, Richard, I want to make him, during his life, a certain allowance, and, in case I die before him, I want you to keep it up."

"That can scarcely be expected; it is Mark's duty, not mine, to maintain his father."

Mrs. Daventry always had a fallible point in every scheme of hers, however rational; and Richard always knew where to find it, and, upsetting that, seemed to leave little to be said for the whole. But Aunt

Ann was determined, and her whole mind was, therefore, awake, and had thrown by its indolence for the moment, leaving her naturally quick intellect full play; so she gave up her weak point at once.

"Perhaps you are right," she said; "the duty does not lie with you; but, until Mark sees his way before him more clearly, it certainly does with me, and, seeing my duty, I mean to do it. Now, no one can tell me how better than you can, Richard, and I am come for advice, and expect to find it."

"You forget, mother, that you are already one year's income in arrear; besides your bills, which, I suppose, are not more reasonable than usual. I really do not see what you can do. Your demands upon my income have already been so great, that you impoverish me."

"As if that were possible, Richard, with

your colossal income. I shall pay you, of course, as quickly as I can, but it must be nonsense to say that you feel what you have lent me."

"I make no complaint," said Richard, calmly; "you are my mother, and, I trust that I shall always remember the duty and respect I owe you. Still, the claim ends there, and beyond yourself I must distinctly say I feel no necessity to be generous. You forget that my colossal income, as you call it, is not so much income as floating capital, and I dare not make the pull upon it which you seem to desire."

"I want your advice, not your money, Richard."

"The sneer is scarcely deserved, mother. My purse has always been yours."

"I know it has; but I want you only to tell me what I ought to do. You would not let your poor uncle starve?"

"Well! I think it would be much better

to let them make out their own plans first; and, when they have made economical plans for themselves, you can best see how to help them. Your own affairs are so embarrassed, that I cannot see how you can be expected to do more. They will, very probably, cut their coat according to their cloth, and you can then help with more effect. There is nothing like making people help themselves at first; you can do twice as much for them afterwards."

The advice was very reasonable, but it was cold.

"I wish you could spend a whole day there," was his mother's only reply; "I wish you could see how every scheme fails, and how evil fortunes dog them like a blood-hound."

"I thought Margaret would have been married by this time," said Richard, with a great effort.

"Ah, yes!" said Mrs. Daventry, "if it had not been for my stupid fault."

"How?" said Richard, trying hard to speak calmly.

Aunt Ann hastily narrated the events of the last few days at Hastings, while Richard listened with his head bent moodily down.

"But, do you think she liked him, after all?" he enquired, looking up with sudden animation.

"I am sure and positive she did, with all her noble heart; and, Richard, it is I who have helped to break it."

Perhaps Richard expected a different answer, for his countenance fell again.

The vision which his mother had conjured up of Margaret, in all the fierce beauty of her indignation and anger, was present to him at that moment; and there was no charm strong enough to put it aside, even in the troth he had that day plighted.

"What is it you want to do?" he said, at last, in his peevish business manner.

"I want to be able to guarantee them at least a hundred a year."

"You cannot do it for the next year or two," said her son.

"This I will do then," said Mrs. Daventry warmly, "I will sell my carriage and horses, dismiss my servants, and take a house in the country, and have them all to live with me. If I do that, I shall economise at the same time."

"Ah!" said Richard lazily, "that might do for a time, only I am afraid it would run you into great expense. You are so incautious, dear mother, you would be in debt before the end of the quarter, and then you would have a burden on your shoulders for life, which you could not well get rid of. But surely there is no such very great hurry; cannot you advance them a little money to help them on for a few months, and then

Mark may think of something. However much you may be called upon to help, surely the whole responsibility does not lie with you. But I will think it over."

His mother knew that the vague promise of future thought implied something very indefinite, but so much had passed that evening, likely to disturb the thoughts of both, that, however unwilling to leave the subject, she felt she could not force it further. Whatever else might be doubtful, it seemed certain, at least, that he was determined upon giving to her plans nothing but the most lukewarm help. Richard was a hard man, a man belonging to the business world, as much as his mother did to the world of fashion, and he had shaped his notions especially to it; but he was according to these principles conscientious, and he never thought of any thing like active revenge. But surely there could be no harm in keeping quiet, in standing aside with

supercilious pride while those who had injured him rolled faster and faster down the hill. He could not blame himself for that; he merely stood aloof, while the ship-wrecked vessel went down before his eyes; he had not helped to raise the storm, nor could he be supposed responsible for the clumsy management which had helped on the catastrophe.

"Well!" he said, at last, finishing his glass of wine, and rising deliberately, "I think we can say no more to-night, and therefore we had better go to the other room. Julia will wonder what has become of us."

"You go," said his mother, "I will join you presently. I must have one half hour to myself."

Richard went, leaving his mother alone; and then, and not till then, she covered her face with her hands and began to cry. How she had looked forward to a day like

this; how she had amused herself and planned and schemed to get her Richard well married, and to-night the news of her success fell like lead upon her heart.

Julia Anstruther had come between her and Richard, that was why there was no other reason, except that she was not of the pure ore as Margaret was. She remembered that look of Richard's, and tried to make out what he would have said, and she thought she interpreted it to mean: "Why did you bring Travers to take her from me?"

Then she said bitterly to herself, 'Richard loves Margaret, but as an angry man loves; and yet he will marry Julia.'

Then she had a good cry over this thought, and when that was over, she dried her eyes and said, 'the simplest and the kindest and the easiest course is to make the best of it *now*; but of this I am determined, I will

plan and scheme no more; people shall marry or not marry, just as they like. I will have nothing more to do with it.'

Having arrived at this conclusion, she decided that her further absence from the drawing-room might look odd, so she went to her room and re-arranged her cap, and bathed her eyes, and brightened herself up a little, added a new brooch and ribbon, which she had forgotten in her hasty toilet before dinner, and then came down stairs looking quite fresh, and smiling, no one could make "the best of it" better than Aunt Ann.

It cost her a little effort, however, to enter the room; but having entered it, she devoted herself with the courage of a Decius, and walking straight up to Miss Anstruther, put her arm round her neck and kissed her, and bade her be a good child, and make Richard happy, and she would love her very much indeed. Miss Anstruther returned the

kiss, blushed, smiled, looked at Richard, then down to the floor, and said—nothing.

Richard said for her, "Thank you mother!" then put a chair near the table, where tea had been waiting Mrs. Daventry's attendance for the last half hour, and he then started some ordinary topic of conversation, but he looked depressed, and as if more than usually burdened with the responsibilities of life; and that night he went home early. The truth had dawned upon him too. He had been false to himself; he loved Margaret, angrily and regretfully it is true; but he still loved her; and he was secretly out of temper with himself, and all the world.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mrs. Daventry had been so accustomed to receive her son's words, as an authority beyond dispute, that she could not remain uninfluenced by his advice, steadily and strongly as she had at first appeared to rebel against it. Besides this, she was too deeply moved by the knowledge of her son's engagement, to feel as vigorously determined about anything as she had asserted herself to be. To be vigorous in feeling is one thing, in action

another; and Mrs. Daventry's feelings had always been as strong as her intellect had been indolent.

To indulge in both, she had temporised all her life; she had felt strongly, but acted idly. Had Richard but assented, instead of opposing, she was prepared to set an example of nobility, which should put to shame thousands who professed a stricter code of morality than her own; but Richard had opposed, with his coldness and superiority of judgment, and his impassable indifference, and therefore his mother's enthusiasm died, for want of either nourishment or direct opposition. So she fell into the old habit of temporising; she would give present help, and leave the future for further consideration. As for lamenting over her debt to her son, it sat no heavier upon her than as it crippled her present means, and rendered her unable to spend with freedom.

She termed his a colossal fortune, and laughed at the idea of her petty extravagances really hurting him. But he had hinted pretty plainly, that whatever his liberality to her might be, it was for her own use simply, and stopped there. Had she known what had passed between him and Margaret, she would have understood him too well to have spoken to him at all; but she remembered only that her brother had been to her son, the most kind-hearted uncle possible, free with advice, and free with help, when Richard was young enough to need both, in many ways. She knew that Richard had formed his society through his uncle's introductions, and was indebted to him for much kindness.

Therefore, she believed that he ought to be rejoiced at having the opportunity of coming forward to his aid; she forgot, how in action, she had found it so difficult to deny herself the most trumpery piece of fashionable or

nonsensical finery or *bijouterie* for her brother's sake, much as she had always loved him, and deeply as she had felt for him.

She could not, however, forget Margaret's grief, real and natural as it was, and the cause, which (as she knew also) enhanced every other trouble, and robbed her of power, deep and secret as it lay, hid from every eye but her own. And yet, when the morning came, the strongest impression upon her mind was of what Richard had said, and a sense of weariness which incapacitated her, so she believed, for taking any definite line of action or doing anything so decisive, or to her indolent mind so terrible, as dismissing any one of her servants, or ordering her carriage for sale.

There yet remained the hope, that in Margaret's fertile mind, some new expedient had arisen more hopeful than the last, or that Mark's desperate energy had devised some remedy, in which she might help as

Richard had suggested. She had ordered her carriage an hour later than usual, that she might carry out her intention of making the best of Richard's engagement, and stayed to chat with Julia about ribbons and laces; for Julia blushingly, and with some little hesitation and confusion, had confessed that Richard had expressed his determination to be married immediately.

To attend to the thousand and one requirements of a bride elect, was a task in which Mrs. Daventry delighted so much, as almost to make her forget how small a fraction of love she possessed for her intended daughter-in-law. To one conclusion, however, she had arrived, which was that Miss Anstruther's wealth would grace that of Richard, and that as Richard had acted wisely all his life, he had no doubt done so now.

To devote due attention to Julia, she must relax her visits to Starborne Street,

and she had decided upon excusing herself that day, for they would well understand why it was absolutely necessary, that her first thoughts should be given to Richard's intended bride. So she put a ten pound note in her purse, and took it down to Margaret, to give her time to think, she said, and to make certain that she would not fret.

Margaret thanked her with real gratitude; she knew her Aunt so well, that she had never calculated upon more than her casual help, and she could not see the secret reproaches which were felt so much, and covered so well.

It was difficult to tell whether Aunt Ann required congratulation or condolence upon her son's engagement. Margaret was ready to sympathize in either feeling; but she herself was deeply pained that Richard had taken this step, and she could not

but feel, that after what she had said to him, he would bear her now but increased ill-will, if he remembered it.

She perfectly agreed with her aunt in thinking, that if she wished to continue the good understanding which had always existed between her son and herself, she must fail in no courtesy to Julia now. Richard was not the kind of man with whom to quarrel; and Margaret, however open and honest in her indignation, when indignation was necessary or deserved, never "stirred up strife," or fostered in the minds of others feelings of suspicion or injury. Nay, she went further, she told her aunt that she had "made the match," and therefore that it peculiarly belonged to her to be happy and contented upon the occasion. Aunt Ann was delighted with this advice; to be unhappy or to quarrel about any thing was peculiarly disagreeable to her; and now that Margaret, whose honest counsel never flinched from the

needful truth, gave her leave to approve, she rendered herself up to thoughts of milliners, dressmakers, and jewellers, with a free conscience. Her mind rapidly became engrossed with these her pet indulgences, and instead of spending the day with her brother she now only came to sit an hour, which hour became shorter and less frequent as Julia's claims upon her time increased. Julia flattered her by a continual reference to her opinion in every thing, nor would she purchase the most trifling article of dress except in her presence, and at the shops where she was accustomed to deal. Aunt Ann used to call her stingy when she tried in vain to betray her into any little act of extravagance, to which she thought her ample fortune might have entitled her; but she had no reason to complain of her prudence now. Julia said she knew what was due to Richard, and purchased accordingly; the most costly dresses and the most hand-

some jewels were sent to Aunt Ann's lodgings; and the latter revelled in the novelties by which she was surrounded, and gave her advice, that a woman did well to spend, while her money was her own.

Aunt Ann did not mind the courtship now, that she saw how it was all to end; the mystery which had attached itself to it had annoyed her before, but she took little notice of it now, although she did feel that Julia gave herself up entirely to Richard's authority, too much as if she were already his wife.

"It will not answer," she said to herself, "Richard is a man, and I never knew a man yet who had not his little odd ways, which required mending, and which never were mended better than by the woman he loves usurping that power which he is so glad to lend her, knowing that she ministers only to his happiness."

But Julia took no power; it seemed sufficient to her that Richard loved her; she

aspired no further, and tried for no further influence. He loved her, and would marry her, so he had said. It was enough; she evidently cared for nothing more but bent herself to his will, and did his bidding as contentedly and obediently as a pet spaniel.

Richard was proud of this authority, proud of shewing how easily she obeyed him already, how reasonable and how little exacting she was, and how entirely she suffered his opinion to govern hers in every thing, yielding entirely her little womanly power to him, nay, how entirely, she courted and he was courted.

"It will not do," said Aunt Ann, when she found a lull from the fascinating occupations of shopping, "she will not make Richard any the happier, or the better by all this, and it will end in ennui after all."

"In ennui!" exclaimed Margaret, when

this confidence was carried to her, "Oh, if you had sketched a tragedy, and carried it through three acts, you could not have brought it to a more terrible end. I have often dreamed of such a possibility happening to myself, and never could think of any thing which would be more difficult to bear than a marriage which ended in ennui."

CHAPTER IX.

When Aunt Ann's daily visits ceased, the old calm and quiet, the old prison feeling, seemed to Margaret to settle down upon Starborne Street. Mr. Hamilton was better; and, although unable to leave his room, anxious apprehension was no longer entertained upon his account.

Mark had declared his intention of taking charge of his family; but, whether by renting for them some cheap cottage in the

country, or by contriving that they should live with him somewhere in London, was yet matter for consideration.

He had steadily kept away from Kate Lyndhurst, in spite of Margaret's advice to temporise, for he knew his weakness, and rather exaggerated the weight of the responsibility, which had so suddenly fallen upon him. This self-sacrifice nearly crushed him, when alone, but he bore up bravely before his father, who was half deceived by his kindly assumed cheerfulness. But Margaret saw the deception, and sympathised with the secret struggle.

"Let us be together, Mark," she said, when the question was under discussion. "Somewhere about the Inns of Court you might find three rooms, or, perhaps four, within your means. Papa will be happier in London, and with you, than he can be anywhere else, and mamma will be within a walk of Alice. Fred will succeed in find-

ing something, I am sure, because he continues so determined. Olivia and I will meet with some situation, too, I have little doubt, and so have the power to help you at home. You will manage to receive us in the holidays?"

"No," said Mark, almost sternly, "I put my decided veto upon that; I do not sacrifice the secret hope of my life without realising an adequate advantage. That advantage is, that, however poorly we may live, we may yet be together; and that, however humble the home I offer, it shall be a home for all. My sisters shall not lose position, nor shall they be exposed to the pitiless kindness of strangers, so long as they are contented with the crust which I can yet afford them; thanks, and I say it with pride, to my own prudence, in choosing to become a Fellow of St. John's, rather than a gentleman Commoner of Christchurch. I shall ask you to submit to many discomforts; to

a thousand privations; but I give a full equivalent, you shall have a real home, though that home be in a garret."

There was a decision and a sternness in Mark's manner, which it was impossible to resist; and to Margaret his words conveyed inexpressible consolation. She knew that her strength and energy were alike failing; that the gnawing pain at her heart was wearing away her life, the more surely that it was concealed, and that she had never suffered herself wholly to give way. She felt so unequal to a further struggle, or to anything like an exposure of her feelings amongst strangers, that she turned with something like hope to the prospect held out by Mark.

Nowhere, she felt certain, would it be so possible for her to recover health and repose of mind, as with him whose constant and unwearying affection from boyhood to manhood, had been so exceedingly precious to

her. Indeed, so great and real had been the affection which had always existed between them, that it had given sufficient impulse and interest to life to screen her altogether from those transitory fancies, with which some girls seek to eke out their existence.

Her love for her brother was true and healthy, and had helped much to give to her that vigour of mind which had saved her from many weaknesses and foibles. But the more true her heart was, the more healthy its action, and the more vigorous her mind had grown by thought and reflection, so the more deep and abiding, was the impression made upon both, by the intellectual and high-minded Mr. Travers.

Now that the old prison feeling had returned, her thoughts went back to him with the same tired longing with which the solitary prisoner remembers the glorious sunlight. It was plain that she could do nothing to help those so near and dear to her, and that

she must practise that most difficult of virtues—patience—and wait until Mark had perfected his scheme; and, in the meanwhile, devote all her time and thoughts to her father, who missed Aunt Ann's cheerful visits, and found a difficulty in getting through the day, without the complaint, which he had pledged himself never again to utter.

Alice and her husband had returned home in time to re-assemble the school with punctuality; and Mrs. Hamilton was occupied and enlivened by daily visits to her married daughter, whose prudence she almost hourly extolled.

Margaret had been to see her, and had satisfied herself that she seemed quite contented with, nay, proud of her new life; and she felt grateful to see her already so much at home in her arrangements for the boys; but it was more congenial to her feelings to sit all day, when no other duty

interfered, reading by her father's bedside, in soft, low tones, some holy book, which ministered to his soul's deep, hungry need; or, sitting by the open window, working in silence, to find leisure to think, not murmuringly, but with an earnest attempt to find consolation in resignation.

She would have given very much to gain some insight into Mr. Travers's present feelings, to know whether he regretted the past, or, when in her first indignation, she had believed him impelled to an avowal by duty and by pity, she had judged him rightly. Aunt Ann now never mentioned him, and though she would have trembled at the sound of his name, yet the perfect silence was still more distressing. Sometimes she would lay down her work and try to remove the nervous pain across her forehead, which daily increased in severity, by not thinking, by forgetting to regret and to recall the past; as for the future

she seldom thought of it, never as connected with herself and him.

From her low seat near the window, she could not fully see the street, nor notice the passengers, who approached on that side of the way. She was sitting so one afternoon, marking by the change in the atmosphere, and the tone of the sky, how much of the autumn had already past, and thinking still more of the summer which had gone from her as a beautiful dream, than of the winter which was now so near, and which would render every increased trial more difficult to bear; when her reverie was broken by a sound, which of late had become to her singularly unwelcome, the ringing of the door bell, followed by a low, but distinct double knock at the door.

"It is Dr. Arden," she said to herself, "or mamma and Olivia have come back, and have found Alice out, or, perhaps Mr. Smith is coming to see papa."

She turned from the window and stood nervously waiting. So weak and easily agitated had she become, from the shock her nerves had sustained, from which she could no longer rally with her old elasticity of spirit.

But Mary is coming up the stairs alone, and with an air of mystery and importance, enters saying "a gentleman wishes to see you Miss;" and puts into her hand a card—"Mr. Travers."

CHAPTER X.

To a man possessed of the impetuous disposition of Mr. Travers, few trials could have chafed him more than the one which he had lately endured.

During the first days of his daughter's illness, he had devoted himself to her with a love only inferior to that of a mother, and when those few days of danger had past, and the youthful invalid, who had always had but a sickly constitution, suffered from terrible languor, and weakness, which made

her querulous and impatient of reproof or amusement, he, one of the master spirits of his age, laid aside every pursuit in which he delighted, to minister to her pleasure and to sooth the trying hours of lingering sickness. No one, watching his untiring efforts and seemingly unexhaustible funds of amusement, could have guessed that any other feeling occupied him beyond devotion to his child. His active mind had not failed to use every guard which art could devise or wealth could purchase, to prevent the spread of fever amongst his household. But notwithstanding every effort, the deadly poison circulated, and two of his younger servants, the kitchen-maid and the footman were successively attacked, and took the fever in a severe form. They recovered slowly from this most insidious disease, but it was many weeks before the alarmed household held themselves safe or ceased to watch for symptoms. It took a still

longer time before friends or neighbours ventured to approach the house, as Mr. Travers had placed his domain in rigid quarantine. So much cause had he had to feel and know the dangerous nature of the fever by the heavy loss which it had formerly caused him, that he would not suffer any to come within the gates of his grounds, lest they might possibly carry away with them the infection, of which he had almost a superstitious horror.

To one of his vast mental resources, such a temporary seclusion would not, under ordinary circumstances, have been of much import; but it chafed and fretted him now beyond measure. He must see Margaret Hamilton, but when or how. He knew she loved him, he would not doubt it, he dared not; but he knew also that under the present circumstances of their parting, a formal and written proposal of marriage would be the very last thing,

success; the bloom of health dawned upon her cheeks, and the little limbs became smooth and rounded; the child was exquisitely happy, and therefore she gained health rapidly. To be her father's companion always and in every thing, to shut out all other love for his sake, that was this child's dream in those few happy weeks, and her father made the same mistake with her as he had done with her mother. Because he had not, and never could have given his whole affection, as he was capable of giving it, to that mother—he had given her more indulgence in everything than he would have given to the really beloved, and he still continued to pay his child the debt, which his exacting conscience had incurred to that poor, young, meek, unhappy wife.

At length, he sent for Ada's governess, who had been absent when the fever first attacked her, and whose return, under the circumstances, Mr. Travers had prohibited.

Mrs. Cotgrave readily obeyed his summons, and was but sulkily received by her pupil; for she knew that her governess's return would, in all probability, be the unwelcome signal for her father's departure.

Ada did not remember the days and weeks, which the man of the great intellectual world had devoted so exclusively to her, or remembered them rather with the craving desire for more such enjoyment; and made them the means of fostering her secret failing, an inordinate desire to be loved, a desire which, when anything earthly is its object, as surely earns its own punishment, as it is in itself selfish and unreasonable.

When, therefore, at length, Mr. Travers gently but firmly announced his intention of leaving her to Mrs. Cotgrave's care during his temporary visit to town, which had now become necessary, Ada received the intelligence with a burst of tears and sobs, and utterly refused to be comforted. Mr.

Travers reasoned and caressed, and Mrs. Cotgrave reasoned and scolded; but Ada only dried her tears, to take up a plaintive mood, and to shew how pale her cheeks could grow by suffering.

But though a fond father, Mr. Travers was anything but a weak man; and thus Ada had the satisfaction of spoiling entirely the last two days of his stay in Brighton, without making him delay his intended departure by an hour, or stipulate for even one day less in the intended term of his absence.

There remained now no valid reason to forbid his consulting his own inclinations, and he went up to London by the express. He was fond of the express train as it suited his humour, for he was patient but not dilatory. And now he suffered himself to yield to the strength of feelings, which had been pent up so long.

He reached Town. How should he see

Margaret? Should he ride down to Islington and loiter about her dwelling until he could find a chance of meeting her? Should he go to Mrs. Daventry's, and take his chance of seeing her there? No! when Mr. Travers had determined upon any course of action, he was not the man to trust to chance or accident; or when a straight and direct road lay before him, to take a crooked one instead.

He would go direct to Starborne Street. Many excuses might warrant his calling there, and the simplest course is always the easiest. It was, however, too late that day, and he did not choose to call at any other than the regular visiting time. That day was easily passed in getting through arrears of business; but the next he resolved should be his own.

That next morning was long in passing; he was up early, that it might go the sooner, trying to read, and to write, and to do many things, and doing nothing but think after

all. Ada's behaviour had made him thoughtful; it was impossible but that it should recall the old uncomfortable days of his first marriage. Had any woman strength to rise above her love so as to be a fit match for him? Surely yes, Margaret upon the down at Hastings had trampled upon that and him. How he loved her for it, not as weak men who look to a future day of penance for so rash a sin, but as a strong man delights to wrestle with the strong, and to subdue by greater strength. Even as he thought of it, he could scarcely restrain his impatience to see her; but if he judged her rightly, she must be sought with all ceremony, or not at all. Anything which looked like presumption, or certainty, would be fatal to his wishes. So he let the day wear on. At three o'clock, he was on the road, and soon after that hour, leaving his groom to put up his carriage at the Angel, he was diving his way into Lower Islington. He must take his

chance of finding her alone, for certainty was impossible. He reached her door, and, pausing for a moment to cast his eyes up and down the street, perhaps to realise what her feelings there must be, he knocked, and was admitted by Mary into the little drawing-room, for Mary prided herself, not unreasonably, upon her instinct in detecting a gentleman from a man of doubtful genus. Here Mr. Travers was left to his reflections, and these were by no means tranquil.

Would she come? How would she come? Upon the last of these questions, at that moment, his very life seemed to hang. Would she, in the midst of this wreck and ruin, of which in part he guessed, preserve her dignity, or would she be coquettish, or angry still, or faltering and shy?

Mr. Travers was, it must be allowed, in these matters a very peculiar man; but then it must be remembered, that he had been invariably flattered, until he had almost

learned to doubt the truth and nobility of womanhood, and he had been also sorely tried and disappointed. Perhaps, too, after all, he only acknowledged to himself what most men feel without being aware of it. But nothing short of truth of character could satisfy him, he came to test that of Margaret now.

There he stood, hat in hand, upon the hearth-rug, listening much and reflecting more, when, presently there was a step upon the stairs and across the short passage, and the door opened, and Margaret came in. There could be no mistaking the ravages made by those few weeks, as told by the pale cheek and marble brow, and he who was so accustomed to read human nature, saw also the effort it cost her to be calm; but the effort was achieved, and seeing her quiet modesty and dignity his love increased to reverence. And now (the feeling was very strange to him) he was confused, and she looked at ease.

She had greeted him courteously, taking the initiative, begging him to sit down, and taking a seat herself, and then she said in a low voice,

"I am glad to have the opportunity of thanking you myself for your great kindness to my dear father. I am so sorry he is not well enough to see you: he is not yet able to leave his room."

"Indeed," returned Mr. Travers, intent upon the lining of his hat, "I cannot tell you how distressed I was to hear of his illness; we must yet hope that he will recover strength."

"Oh yes, I hope so! but I fear he will never be able to write or to walk again. I told him you were here, and he desired his compliments to you, and a sick man's thanks for your ineffectual kindness."

Margaret spoke easily and steadily, but when she had finished her sentence, Mr. Travers looked up suddenly, and their eyes

meeting, Margaret's fell, while a very slight tinge of colour spread over her weary face.

"You are not well," he said hastily, and apprehensively.

"I am very tired, that is all," she said attempting a smile. "Papa's illness," she added apologetically, "has brought terrible anxiety to us all."

"I have no doubt of it," he said; looking at her, how could he doubt it? Sitting there in her quiet dignity, she seemed like one whose hold on earth had already loosened. He could not bear it; rising hastily and resuming all his old impetuosity again, he stood by her.

"Margaret," he said, while a whole tide of emotions seemed to find utterance in that one word, "Margaret! we parted in anger. Can you forgive me?"

She looked up bewildered. Oh! what a beaming, loving face looked down on

hers. It was a very home of love where that weary heart might find its rest.

"How I have longed for this moment," he continued, not waiting her reply, "longed for the time when I might say all that was in my heart. If you do not care for me, say the word, and I am not the man to weary you with a bootless prayer; but if there is nothing more to part us than the idle interference of others, I will not go. Do not think me too old, (his voice trembled upon the word) you have given me back hope and elasticity of mind, which are youth, and—nay, Margaret, look up, your silence kills me."

She had covered her face with her hands, and was weeping unrestrainedly, because she had been weak and ill, and sorrow stricken so long, and had borne all without complaint; she must give way now, or her heart would break.

He knelt down by her, wrapped his strong

arms about her, and rested her head upon his breast; there needed no other answer, he felt she was his own. But Margaret raised herself almost instantly, though in that one moment a sudden peace and tranquillity had found its way to her heart.

"I am not worthy of you," she murmured scarcely above her breath, "how could you come to such a ruined family as this is, to seek me?"

"Do you ask me?" he said, looking down upon her, for though he held her hand in his, he had risen and stood by her side, "because I love you, and—you love me."

Margaret bowed her head, heavy with blushes, but they were true words which he had spoken, and she did not care to deny them. There was a long and eloquent silence: and then he sat down, and in a low voice, as if he felt how weak and trembling she was, he told her all he had suffered since he had seen her last, of his vain long-

ing for a reconciliation, and the impossibility of seeking it; and then he led her to speak of herself and of her father. How pleasant it was thus to be together again; neither, perhaps, until that moment had learned how much they loved, and, indeed, absence had deepened feeling and given force to sentiment. It was difficult for Mr. Travers to subdue the almost excessive pleasure he experienced, but impossible to indulge it when he watched her pale face and drooping form.

He himself looked brilliantly well; the long holiday which he had forced himself to take, and the bracing strolls by the sea, and his attention to everything which could restore Ada's health, had, without his perceiving it, ministered to his own.

"And now," he said, at length, "I must attend to business; you know I never let that sleep in my hands. May I ring the bell?"

"If you like," said Margaret wondering what order their eccentric servant was about

to receive, and how she would take it. Mary entered radiant with good humour.

"Will you have the goodness," said Mr. Travers, "to ask your master if I can see him for a few minutes?"

Mary departed.

"You will be very cautious," said Margaret in some alarm, "the least agitation might hurt him."

"I will be very cautious. Shall I find you when I come down?"

"I think not," said Margaret, who longed to be quite alone. "You will probably find mamma and Olivia here; and I shall leave you to introduce yourself."

"Good bye, then," he said tenderly, "you will not be out at three to-morrow?"

"No! oh no!" was the low reply.

"Will you walk up if you please, sir?" said Mary, looking in; and Mr. Travers, turning once more at the door, as if it cost him an effort to leave her, followed Mary up-stairs.

Margaret hurried to her room, her little room which had been the witness of such long and patient sorrow, such continued struggles with adverse fortune, and knelt down by her bed, from which so often the agonized prayer had ascended. It was for this that she had longed to be alone, that her thankful spirit might find repose in holy gratitude and praise. No human ear could hear, no human heart could understand that deep happiness, which Divinity has conferred, as, perhaps, the highest of earthly blessings. Let no one venture to despise that to which God has given honour. Meeting this love, as most of us do somewhere in life, upon its threshold, amidst its busy turmoil, or nearer its close; let us meet it as Christians should, remembering that it is God's gift. Let us hallow it and reverence it, and accept it solemnly as a weighty responsibility, as men and women should who have a heaven before them, and the eye of the Almighty for ever upon them.

CHAPTER XI.

It had been said of Mr. Travers, by his friends, that he never allowed a day to pass without making some one the happier for his existence. This was an exaggeration, of course. The best of men have their times of flagging, their hours of weariness and their seasons of temptation, when they may be said to stop upon their road and forget life's high purposes. With nerves finely touched, and a spirit exquisitely susceptible of pain, Mr. Travers certainly suffered from these moods as much as

most men; but upon the whole his mind was vigorous and his sympathies alive, and the very keenness of his susceptibility made him ready to detect the cause of another's sorrow, and shrink from rudely touching, or idly neglecting it. He delighted in doing a kindness, it made him happy, and the frankness which made this apparent, rendered him universally a favourite. If he presumed upon his great popularity at all, it was that he took a shorter road to men's affections than most men take. It was in this mood that he sought Mr. Hamilton; gently and considerately, but with that affectionate earnestness, which he knew so well how to use when he pleased, he went to the sick man's room that day.

He made so much of the boon he came to ask, so little of himself who asked it, that Mr. Hamilton covered his worn face with his thin hand, and wept for pride and pleasure. His Margaret, his dear child

who had suffered so for him, had so wrestled with his weakness and his sin, would be happy after all. It seemed in that moment, enough to have lived for this, and impossible to have a thought beyond her. Mr. Travers noticed this, and remembered it well. Mr. Hamilton recognized him, too, as one of those who had met him when the bank failed, and much as he had had to lament and grieve over since, he could not but think of his behaviour at that time as praiseworthy; it cheered him to think that he had witnessed it; that he had known him in the days when he had still the remains of a rich, though ruined man about him, and he recalled by the sound of his voice, how kindly that voice had supported him then. Gently and skilfully Mr. Travers led him from sorrowful themes; nothing which he said was obtrusive, yet nothing was common place; his very manner brought confidence and hope with it; but he intruded no

further. His coming to this sick room was like the opening beams of the sun piercing through a thick fog, so cheerful so inspiriting was his conversation. He did not, however, suffer himself to stay long enough to tire him; but obtaining his promise to secure Mrs. Hamilton's sanction to his marriage with her daughter, took his leave.

He was not, perhaps, very inclined to introduce himself "to mamma and Olivia," and thought it better to let the subject dawn upon them in a less surprising manner; perhaps, too, he was determined that Margaret should do for him, what she had told him to do for himself.

Mrs. Hamilton's satisfaction and joy, when her husband communicated the startling arrangements which had been effected during her short absence, were as great as her former depression had been. Her praises of Margaret knew no bounds, she questioned

and enquired and sifted the matter to the very bottom, and left her blushing child no rest until she sought it by her father's bedside.

Mrs. Hamilton had formed a very high idea of Mr. Travers, from the proffered government appointment, and the visions of a cadetship for Fred, mingled very decidedly with her real and unaffected satisfaction, in seeing the happiness of her unselfish child, which no blushing cheek or silent tongue had power to hide. She could not satisfy herself, however, with keeping news of such import to themselves, and as soon as she had taken a hasty cup of tea, she hurried off to surprise Alice and Mr. Smith with her presence.

She found Alice alone, Mr. Smith being with the boys for their evening lessons. Alice received the intelligence in a manner totally unexpected; unable or unwilling to control her feelings, instead of rejoicing

with her mother, she bemoaned her own hard fate. She, so young, to have married as she had done, when such an opportunity for a good introduction into society lay before her now! The case was hard, indeed, and Alice was exceedingly bitter about it; she even accused Margaret of slyness, and of wilfully defrauding her of her just rights.

"There!" she exclaimed, "Olivia must take advantage of this opening, it is too late for poor me!"

Mrs. Hamilton was unaffectedly shocked; but on her way home, she began to think that Alice had reason for what she had said, and from that hour, instead of congratulating herself upon her younger daughter's happiness, she exalted her to the rank of a martyr.

In a moment of confidence, just before retiring to bed, Mrs. Hamilton recited to Margaret the greater part of what had passed between Alice and herself, ending

with, "poor thing, it is no use to think of that now."

"Oh! mamma, does she say that?" exclaimed Margaret excitedly. "How dreadful! Oh! if I could but have known this, I would have wounded myself a thousand times rather than not have told all that I had suffered; but, dear mamma, it would have grieved you so much, and might have led to a misunderstanding with Aunt Ann. How could I think it possible, he would ever follow me here, after so long a time? Poor, poor Alice! how wrong of her. Oh! this has made me so unhappy."

"Nonsense, child," said Mrs. Hamilton, "it was quite her own doing, and no one could have done more to turn her against Mr. Smith than you, dear. It is true, poor thing, she might have done better, and that I daresay she sees now; but what use is there in talking of that? we cannot unmarry her, and though he is a little

peculiar, he makes her a very good husband. She thinks it a little hard now, but she will soon forget it."

Mrs. Hamilton spoke to her daughter as to the future Mrs. Travers; but Margaret was fearfully distressed, and could not find any comfort in these excuses. Alice had then been guilty of a heinous wrong, and was already reaping the fruits of her falsehood to all that was good and holy in her nature.

Poor Margaret! when she should have been so happy, cried herself to sleep that night.

CHAPTER XII.

THE next afternoon punctual to the hour he had named, Mr. Travers' carriage stopped in Starborne Street. Mrs. Hamilton, with her best cap on, and with as holiday an appearance as she could present, was working and waiting for him in the drawing room alone. She was prepared to be charmed with her daughter's suitor, and she was charmed. When she apologized to him for their change of circumstances, and for the shabbiness of their abode, graciously regretted that he had not sought her daugh-

ter under more favourable circumstances; he, at once, accepted their reverses as a matter for serious consideration; but treated the fact rather as if he might have been poor yesterday and might be poor to-morrow, but that the accident of wealth was upon his side to-day. He said gravely that he sought nothing but the cordial approval of the whole family; that as he was already possessed of sufficient wealth to meet his desires, wealth in a wife was a matter of the most perfect indifference to him. Having said all that appeared necessary and proper, he looked uneasily at the door, and trusted that Miss Hamilton was not indisposed. Mrs. Hamilton readily took the hint, and replied that Margaret was reading to her father, but that she would take her place and send her down, and so moved easily from the room. With the prospect of something to be proud of, Mrs. Hamilton's good-natured easy manner had returned, and she was to-day, for

the first time since the failure, like herself.

Mr. Travers had restrained his impatience during the somewhat lengthened interview, and was rewarded by Margaret's coming. He was so rejoiced to see her, so satisfied in her presence, that it was quite cheering to see him. There was something so reverential; and yet so almost touching in his love for her, that had not Margaret been genuine to the very heart, she must have shrunk before the ordeal.

"Tell me!" he said, with that peculiar modulation of the voice known to love only, "what has been the matter, something has grieved you even since we parted? Oh, my love! do not tell me you repent of yesterday's work; but if it be so, better that I hear it now than—" Margaret placed her hand in his, saying earnestly,

"With this hand is pledged to you my entire affection. I pray you believe me. This

suspicion is the only fault which I have yet discovered in you; but it is sufficient to make me very unhappy. If you, upon your side, cannot believe me, say so, and let us part."

"Margaret, I do believe; but it seems so strange that you are really mine, I cannot realize it. But yet you have been grieving."

"Then you do not believe me after all: not remembering how many causes for anxiety I may have. Yes! I was very unhappy last night. Some expressions dropped by my dear sister to mamma, made me think she was not quite so happy as I wished her to be. There, see how wrong I have been to tell you what passed between a young wife and her mother; but I feel that I can trust you as I can myself, and I know that you will receive my thoughts, not as words, but as thoughts."

"You cannot think how happy you make me; the confidence you repose in me shall

not be abused. Be assured this explanation was very kind; some women would have unwisely refused it. Let us cure each other's faults by being lenient, not harsh with them, it is the surest method, I am certain. It is, after all, but natural that I should wonder at my own good fortune in securing that affection, which has been so sought for by others."

"You allude to my cousin Richard," said Margaret, determined to meet him openly, and remembering well the scenes at Hastings. "You were, perhaps, puzzled at my behaviour to him?"

"I certainly was; and it was this doubt which deterred me, so often, from declaring myself. To me you appeared as contradictory as I, perhaps, appeared to you."

"If you had possessed the key to my feelings, you would have understood how difficult it was to check and restrain the admiration of a man whom I not only esteemed, but very sincerely liked."

"But you will not wonder that I did not understand it, and that this forced me to restrain myself? Nay, while I am about it, let me make a full confession. Do you remember that evening party to which I refused to go, because I would leave the coast clear to others?"

"Perfectly," said Margaret, looking down, while a blush stole almost imperceptibly over her features; for she well remembered the little scene before the party, when he had so nearly betrayed himself.

"Well!" continued Mr. Travers, "you left me writing; and, as I was up when you returned, you, doubtless, supposed that I had been working with great industry all the evening; but, in reality, dissatisfied with myself, and restless without you, I went out. I had certainly no intention of doing more than divert my thoughts; and yet, some few hours afterwards, I found myself, by the merest accident, or, as it then seemed by a strange fatality, near Mr. Mortham's house."

"You there!" exclaimed Margaret. "What a distance from Hastings! Surely, you mistook the house?"

"I was there," continued Mr. Travers, not unmindful of the bright look of pleasure which irradiated Margaret's face. "I knew the house by its answering the description your aunt had given me of it; and, besides, lights were streaming through the windows, and the last popular tunes were being played. No, I knew the house well enough, and I felt an intense desire, amounting to determination, to see you; and I was just thinking how I might reach the windows of the dancing-room, unseen, when the music ceased, and the dancers came out to walk in the moonlight. I drew back to the shadow of a large tree, close by a narrow walk, in time to conceal myself, when you came down it, leaning on your cousin's arm. I could not have withdrawn without going into the full light of the moon, for which I was not inclined; and, therefore, it was that, as you passed, I dis-

tinctly heard him say, 'You know I love you, Margaret; why will you not believe me?' Need I say that these words confirmed my past doubts, and that before I reached the Croft that night, I had resolved entirely to withdraw my attentions. You remember what followed?"

"Ah! you see the folly of suspicion!"

"And yet I never carried it to an unreasonable extent, or was absurd about it. Your frank assertions never failed to convince me against all other evidence."

"Poor Richard!" said Margaret, "have you seen him since?"

"No; what of him?"

"He is going to be married to Miss Anstruther."

"Impossible! But this is his mother's doing, I suppose. I thought she was extremely anxious to throw them together; but I always ridiculed the possibility of her success."

"It is, and it is not, my aunt's doing; she wished it at Hastings, and has disliked the idea of it since; though she is now so busy shopping for the bride, that, I think, she forgets why she objected."

"Well, then," said Mr. Travers, laughing, "all is well that ends well."

"I do not think so," said Margaret, "a little honest grief does no man harm, even if it be the best of men grieving for the loss of the weakest of women."

Mr. Travers was silent for a little while, and then he resumed more gravely.

"How selfish I am in talking so entirely of myself; without seeking to remove the grief which still oppresses you about those so dear to you. There is still a reserve in your feelings towards me, which I feel, though I cannot quite understand. Is there any request of yours which you will favour me by letting me grant? You have several times been upon the point of speaking, but—"

"But my courage failed," said Margaret, "it is quite true I have something which I am afraid to tell you, for I cannot deceive you in anything, however painful confession may be."

Mr. Travers was a strong man, but a hue of ashy paleness spread over his face whilst he watched her with apprehension.

"Do not look so serious, or I shall find it impossible to speak," said Margaret.

"You try me, Margaret; be quick with what you have to say."

He was paler still: was he to hear now the confession of some old love, which should steal forward and remain for ever a shadow resting between him and her sufficient to cloud, if not to darken that future which had seemed, but a minute ago, so bright. Margaret regarded him apprehensively, he was so vexed that he looked angry, and true love is quick to pacify. She was sitting on the low seat close by the arm chair, in which her mother had located

him, and placing her hand upon his arm, she looked entreatingly at him; but he turned aside his head vexed and sad, nay almost angry, at the vision he had conjured up.

"You make my task difficult," said Margaret, "but, however difficult, I must perform it."

His head was still turned away, he could not look at the face he loved so well, and see the confession he so dreaded to hear. And she continued slowly.

"Many painful things have occurred in the last two years, and were I to tell you, what is not the case, that my father is deeply in debt, perhaps you would not wonder."

He turned round and regarded her earnestly.

"You would not wonder at him; but you will wonder when I tell you that I am in debt to my aunt a whole hundred pounds; but I will not seem worse to you than I am, I borrowed this sum to pay a debt of my

dear father's, which harassed him very much. You must not be angry that I did not tell this to you yesterday, for I could not."

So deeply had he been moved, that the big drops stood upon his pale forehead, but turning round now and clasping her hand in both his, he exclaimed: "Were it ten thousand, Margaret, it should be yours as freely as it is mine. My poor, poor child! what have you suffered!"

He fully understood the trial it must be to one possessed of such an ample measure of natural dignity, to have to confess herself to her rich lover, not only poor, but in debt.

"I wish you could tell me anything else, which would lessen the immeasurable distance between us."

"I do not wish you to do more," she said, gently, "than to let me deny myself to pay this money; but I did not like not to tell you, because I object to anything like concealment. You are so kind and good to me, how can I ever show you how grateful I am. But

But why were you so angry just now, you quite frightened me?"

"I thought," said Mr. Travers, "that you were going to make a very different confession; and I dreaded to hear it, that was all."

"But what could I have to tell you?" enquired Margaret, opening her eyes wide with wonder.

"Will you forgive me if I tell you?"

"I do not know; nevertheless tell me."

"And risk your anger?"

"Never mind that."

"Well then, I thought it just possible that you had to tell me of something, which, however just and honourable, and natural, would, I own, have made me excessively unhappy."

"What do you mean? how could anything just and honourable and natural in me, vex you, or, let me give it the right word, make you so very cross?"

"Some old attachment set aside and con-

quered; but leaving its impression still, and excusable enough in a second wife, but—"

The old paleness came back again.

"Extremely possible, extremely natural, and extremely justifiable," said Margaret, meeting his earnest look with one of her most brilliant smiles, "only that it happens not to be true after all; and," she suddenly changed her tone to one of touching pathos, "I am glad it is not so."

Truly it was a circumstance for which to be grateful, that for one who had earned so much of her esteem and reverence, she should also feel that deep affection, which is less the act of the mind, than an inspiration of the heart.

"Now, are you contented?"

"Perfectly!" he exclaimed, "you have met me with candour as well as kindness, and I am most grateful to you. Now tell me, have you anything to ask me?"

"Let me think: yes! let me understand

fully the responsibilities which lie before me. Tell me something of your children."

"My children!" he exclaimed, "my child you should say. I told you of her yesterday. You have not forgotten that I have been all this time doing nothing but nurse her?"

"Yes, which is Ada? I heard you had several children."

"I have only this one," said Mr. Travers, "you have, perhaps, wondered that I never spoke of my children, but I lost all but Ada in the scarlet fever two years since, and the grief I suffered at the time was so great, that I have never voluntarily spoken of their loss since. These circumstances must have been known to your aunt, and I could not suppose you ignorant of them."

"No!" said Margaret, looking down, "I did not know you had ever been married before, until Richard told me so one day at Hastings."

"Do you mean that? In what light must I have appeared to you. My foolish reserve

must, indeed, have given Daventry a reasonable advantage over me."

"Yes! it was not quite right, because instead of accepting the fact as a matter of course, as I should have done, had I known it from the first, I felt as you were about to feel just now, very angry and annoyed."

"And with reason, if you supposed I had had any wish to suppress the fact; but indeed it was not so. Your aunt must have known the whole circumstances. I had no thought of concealment."

Then he gave her a short sketch of the past, his early marriage, and the history of his domestic life; but he was a prejudiced chronicler, the sacred veil of death was drawn between him and the past; and now he was ready to take all the blame, and to lay all the failings and unhappiness of his short married life upon himself. Still he thought it due to her, who, had he met her at any age would have been the woman of his choice, to tell the truth, or as much of the truth as

was consistent with respect to the memory of his dead wife, the mother of his living child; and he did this as, perhaps, only a man of his delicacy of judgment could have done it. He represented the truth of his own disappointment without casting the shadow of a reproach upon his poor meek wife, who had loved him so unwisely, but yet so well. And yet he told quite enough to satisfy Margaret's natural feelings. He then spoke of Ada, of the difficulty of her disposition, but of the strong love she bore him, and then he sadly noticed the infirmity of her figure. It was almost typical of his first marriage, that his fairest blossoms had died, and that this unhealthy nursling alone survived.

"I believe, darling," he said earnestly, "that I have chosen as well for her, as I have for myself; and that you will make our happiness without ministering to our faults; and yet it is a heavy task I offer you, but let me have my own way of repaying you—you shall tend and cultivate my tender

child, and I will take care of all those whom your aunt once designated as your children: father, brother, mother and sister. I assure you that will not puzzle me half so much as my own child does. Is it agreed?" She looked up enquiringly, what did he mean? "Simply this, that your parents and brother and sister shall be mine, when you give me the right to call them so; and because, dearest, it would be impossible, indelicate for me to take a share and responsibility in your family counsel, until I have a right to do so on the part of my wife; do not send me away until you have told me when we can be married. This is a very common-place manner of alluding to the ceremony, but it is to the purpose. When shall we be married?"

"It is surely too soon to ask that question."

"Now do not be unkind; have I not given you an excellent reason, not for haste, for I will not call it so; for when two

persons, perfectly understand each other, and there is not the slightest objection or difficulty lying in the way, tell me why should there be any delay? Is it to give me time to say a great many pretty things, which come with double grace from a husband's lips? But, dearest, do not think of yourself, think of those about whom you have been so tenderly careful, and the absolute necessity of making some efficient arrangement for your father's comfort, which shall be done, as you may dictate, when I have power to move in the matter. I assure you, Ada wants you, and is becoming more spoiled every day for want of better guidance. I am an adept in business, and one month will answer every necessary purpose. My house possesses every moderate comfort, and, to my taste, new furniture would spoil it; but of that you can judge, and it always appears to me to be more sensible for a man

to bring his wife to his home, rather as it is, than run himself possibly into difficulties, to himself uncomfortable, and her an excuse for his own extravagance."

"Oh, pray do not think of anything of the kind! I shall like it twice as well."

"Then," said he, "I will trust everything to your kindness and generosity. To-morrow, remember I come for my answer," he looked at his watch, "How time flies," he observed. "I must go; but first, if you like, we will chat for five minutes with your father. After that I shall dine at the Carlton, where your brother Mark has promised to meet me."

"Indeed! I expected him here."

"Yes, you see I am getting every one on my side, that you may be forced to come over in self-defence; but grant me one favour before I go."

"What is it?"

"I have almost forgotten my Christian

name, it is so long since I have heard it. Will you try to learn to call me William?"

"William!" repeated Margaret, giving by her melodious voice the full advantage to the liquids and vowels, of which the name is composed.

"It has never sounded half so sweetly since my mother last uttered it years ago; thank you loved one. Now we will go upstairs."

Mr. Travers rightly judged, that even a quarter of an hour's conversation with one who came from the world of clubs and politics, would be some break in the long day to Mr. Hamilton, and for this purpose he robbed himself of the last few minutes, which to most lovers are so dear; but he was richly rewarded by the animated countenance of the invalid, his awakened interest, and the sensible pleasure he evidently felt in listening to him. And Margaret as she parted from him there, felt almost as gratified by this little attention

to her sick parent, as she was by his more sterling kindness. He saw this, and her grateful smile was more dear to him, and sent him off more happy, than the most lavish expressions of affection could possibly have done.

CHAPTER XIII.

Mr. Travers and Mark dined together at the 'Carlton,' two intellectual and humble, high-spirited, yet simple men. There is ever a freemasonry in intellect. Those who possess it, are prone to understand each other, and do so more quickly than common-place men. Strong friendships are ever to be found amongst strong minds. Hence it was that these two men met so easily, and conversed so unreservedly. And so it was that they began a friendship which should last a lifetime. Mr. Travers was young in humility and simplicity;

the younger man was old in learning; so that they met almost upon terms of equality, except that the world had set its seal upon the fame of the elder, while the other's laurels were yet unwon. At such a time of family affliction, when his weak hand seemed insufficient to bear the burden set before it, Mark's heart was ready to open to him, who came with such unaffected simplicity and earnestness, to take an elder brother's place, and to stand by them, when all else seemed to shrink away and leave them alone.

Mr. Travers was not only a rich, but an influential man, and seeking nothing for himself beyond freedom for his literary pursuits, he had more time to think of others. The weight of his influence, and his widely-extended connection, would henceforth be linked to his; and, when they parted that night, Mark was not only most grateful for the prospect of happiness opened for his ever-favourite sister, but he was determined to brace up his own

nerves, and struggle on bravely and afresh. So entirely had these new thoughts possessed him, that he could not return to his quiet chambers; but determined rather to walk and cast off the excitement which he felt. His nightly walks all lay in one direction; and, as he had denied himself the privilege of going by day, he often went westward by night, for the simple pleasure of watching the lights in Kate Lyndhurst's windows. As a matter of course, his walk terminated in this point to-night, and he had just taken his station upon the opposite side of the way, when Mr. Lyndhurst's carriage drew up to the door. They were evidently returning from some party, although it was yet early. He saw Kate in her simple white dress, pass into the house, while her uncle stopped to say something to the coachman, and he could not resist the temptation of trying to see her more distinctly. In moving forward, the light fell upon his face from the neighbouring lamp, and Mr. Lyndhurst caught

sight of him. He was about to raise his hat and pass on, when he saw the old gentleman crossing the street to meet him. Retreat was, therefore, impossible; and, before he was well aware of what he was doing, he was in the house.

Kate was so astonished to see him in such a manner, and at such an hour, that she was almost, but not quite, thrown off her guard. She looked very pretty in her white dress; but Mark's quick eye detected, at once, signs of illness, which might have been overlooked by a more indifferent observer. There was a hectic flush upon her cheek, which he had never before noticed, and her uncle had fallen into the habit, it seemed, of taking care of her, instead of suffering her to take care of him.

The first moment of surprise past, Kate remembered that Mark was there only by accident, and not of his own seeking; and hastened

to efface the remembrance of the pleasure she had first evinced by distance and reserve. She even rose, after a few minutes, pleaded fatigue, begged her uncle to excuse her retiring, and wished Mark good night with the easiest coldness possible. This was harder to bear than anything ; and Mark, springing to the door to open it for her, could not resist the temptation of saying, "Will you be out to-morrow afternoon?"

Kate looked up surprised, but there was something in his eager eye which made her lip tremble, and her colour deepen, although she answered with easy indifference, "I think not," as she went out, without stopping for another word or look.

Mark went home half distracted, a few cold words, and a few indifferent looks had upset all his resolutions. He had acted like a madman or a fool, so he said to himself, but how could he help it when she looked so ill,

and when her altered manner betrayed so much, which she deemed so very ably concealed. Ah, Kate! those who love each other are always behind the scenes, and see how the wires move.

Mark went home to think!

Meanwhile Mr. Travers was travelling down to Brighton by the night mail train. He took a few hours sleep, and was up again in time to meet Ada at breakfast. He knew the importance of first impressions, and he paid his little daughter the compliment of coming personally to communicate the intelligence of his intended marriage. Ada feared her father's anger almost as much as she loved him, she did not, therefore, dare to express the vexation she felt, but contented herself by subsiding into the martyr, and trusting that her new mamma would leave her a little of her papa's love, and not take it all away. However, the knowledge that her father was

going back by the next train, seemed to her a legitimate opening for the grief which was swelling in her little jealous heart, and she did not attempt to suppress it before him. Ada was a representative of the past, Margaret of the future, and as he threw himself into the corner of the returning first-class carriage, wearied with his child's petulance and her tears, he rejoiced to think that his intended second wife had a will of her own.

"Wherever you are, Margaret," he said, with a sigh of relief, when he once more found himself seated by her side, "is my home now."

Little could Mr. Hamilton have guessed when he turned with that despairing look upon his own door step, the possibility of its Starborne Street ever seeming to another the very resting place of home and peace.

In the conversation which ensued, Margaret detected the fact that Ada was the great

trouble of his present life, and that her fretful temper was always coming between him and his love for her. The task might be a difficult, but undertaken in a right spirit, it was certainly not an impossible one, and she now began to rejoice that so good an opportunity lay before her of proving, more truly, than by mere words, the affection she entertained for him. She spoke hopefully, then, of the future, and promised to make Ada's character a study, and thus she soon succeeded in chasing away the cloud which hung upon his spirit. But Mr. Travers had not come for the purpose of complaining of his domestic grievances; he was a rapid wooer, and he came determined to have his own way. And as the state of family finance was so deplorable, and Mark had been down there to breakfast, and was enthusiastic about Mr. Travers, and saw no objection whatever, and moreover love being on his side, Margaret consented to be married in one month from that day.

Much of his natural impetuosity there might be mingled with his wish to be married so immediately, but there was much more of thought for her. He had gleaned from her the history of the last few weeks, and had heard from her trembling lips the shuddering narration of her father's walk to the Lea, and had thus learned fully to understand why her nerves were now so weak, and why her health and spirits so sensibly flagged, when not supported by the comfort of his immediate presence. In order that she might shake off the remembrance of what still so painfully agitated her, he knew that the necessary remedy was a relief from further anxiety, and a total change of scene and manner of life. Truly, those who might have guided her, had been as her children whom, in holy love, she had so striven to bring acceptably to the Throne of Heaven, that she had almost become the victim of her over exertion.

Mr. Travers noted all this, the more that

he watched her so earnestly, and that he saw the difference between herself now, and at Hastings, more strikingly from his absence from her. He longed to place her mind at ease, to take her home and surround her with those appliances of wealth, to which from infancy she had been as much accustomed, as she had been to her daily bread.

It would be delightful to ride with her, or to drive her about the country, and to share her perfect love of the beautiful, and well could he imagine that she must pine for all this. It is true, the bills of mortality, set down Islington as one of the most healthy localities in the metropolis, still Starborne Street combines the disadvantages of town and country. It has none of the bustle which enlivens many of the more central parts of London: yet it is surrounded by an interminable number of streets, where reigns

all the dead repose of the country, without any of the changes and varieties which make the dullest country scene an endlessly changing panorama. The air is salubrious no doubt, but men require beauty as well as air; it is a law written upon their hearts, and this fact is proved by the struggle London makes every where for parks and squares. Neither does the line of beauty adhere to the straight lines by which the immediate neighbourhood of Starborne Street is intersected. We can fancy Mr. Smith's holding up his hands in virtuous horror at these sentiments, and Alice outwardly agreeing with him, while internally she is cherishing a growing nervous dislike to the straight lines, not because she dislikes them for themselves, but simply because they are in such broad contrast to Margaret's elegant home at "The Cedars," an injury from which she is never likely to recover. But Mr. Travers sees it all with his

quick, poetical perception; and, therefore, it is that he hurries on his wedding with such hot haste.

That same afternoon Mark Hamilton sat in close deliberation with himself. His words to Kate Lyndhurst had implied an intention of seeing her, and to remain away would be to lay himself open to the suspicion of fickleness and frivolity; he could not bear the idea that she should feel that he merited these charges, that he should justly sink in her opinion, and that he should thus make it easy for her to forget him. Closely as she believed her secret kept, he had read it the night before, more clearly in her delicate reserve, than in any thing else, and the knowledge thus attained had in the moment of surprise and conviction, wrung from him the words which he was now repenting and condemning.

But he had plainly implicated himself, and in honour he was now bound to follow them

up. It was true that Margaret's marriage presented a much more hopeful phase of the family history, and the affectionate sister and daughter would be in a position to help him in the duties of the family support. Yet she would not be independent, and her help would be necessarily governed by the will or caprice of her husband, and that will, although it might, perhaps, be inferred, had certainly not been explained. So that, in reality, his own position was very slightly altered. He had thought differently the night before, but now the features of his own case appeared as plainly before him, as if they had been written in one of his briefs. But he found his way out of the dilemma at last, and then his course was decided upon. He would not go, but staying away and sacrificing himself, he would yet satisfy her womanly delicacy of feeling, by laying before her the tribute of his affection, and so part from her,

perhaps for ever, unless better fortune dawned upon him. She would understand and esteem him, and feel for him; that should be enough.

He sat down and wrote. He told her how he had spoken rashly the night before; and that only, because weak enough to be wounded by a coldness, in which he ought rather to rejoice. He then briefly, and in a few sentences of expressive language, all his own, explained his situation; and then, as briefly placed before her his own sentiments towards her, as a reason why, if he could keep his resolution, he meant to avoid seeing her again. Never once did he imply the possibility of her sharing his sentiments, but intimated rather, that it was simply to save himself her friendship that he so acted; ending with blessings and prayers for her. He forebore altogether to pity himself, or to say a word which should make her doubt that he had definitely chosen his position towards herself, and so, exposing himself that he might

shield her, he expressed his intention of withdrawing altogether from her influence.

There was little time to lose; he knew that she would be expecting him, and he could not bear so to offend her as to make her wait fruitlessly.

His letter was soon written, read, and sealed, and a trusty messenger found to bear it. He hastened to send it, for he seemed now to understand the real state of the case, and to divine that he was taking away the sting of that disappointment which he felt she shared with him.

He then sat down at his desk, thinking so sadly, and yet so sweetly of her. It soothed him to think that she would now believe herself legitimately permitted to grieve with him. That thought stole more peacefully into his mind than any had done for a long time past.

From this mood he was roused by a rap upon the door, and rising to open it himself, for he had not yet arrived at the dignity of having a clerk, he admitted a gentleman who

announced himself as coming from a well known firm, and who brought a heavy bundle of papers. This was a client, one of the many who had come within the last month.

Was it true that business was really coming? And he had sent the letter. Should he hasten after his messenger? No, oh no! he had already learned how much of accident there is in business, and this temporary run upon his time might be nothing after all, or a provision furnished by Providence, that his filial duty might be more possible, not that his own will should be satisfied.

Ah, Mark! has the long trial worn your spirit at last, or, like Margaret, are you suffering from the shock of those late troubles? But, remember, that as you have been loving, and kind, and gentle, and hopeful with your poorer brothers in suffering; as you have not withheld the kind word, or the helping hand; as you have been merciful, and just as you have forgotten no family tie, but have

thankfully shared your means with those who claim from you a just homage, a filial return, so is there One Who, in His great liberality and mercy, accepts all this, not as a due rendered by one who, truly, is but an unprofitable servant, but as a loan, for which—oh, wonderful kindness!—He holds Himself the debtor.

The trial may be long, the blessing may linger, but be not weary, faithful heart, sooner or later it will yet most surely come!

CHAPTER XIV.

MARK felt easier the next day, and went to work with a less feverish spirit than he had done for many past weeks. He had sacrificed, so he believed, any thing which might be of vanity or self-love at the shrine of what was to him most womanly and loveable; he had made a declaration which left him no possibility of knowing what would have been its answer, under more favorable circumstances; but which gave him, now that the act was done, a feeling of peace

with himself, because of peace with her, to which he had long been a stranger, long, if time may be, as it most surely is, reckoned by a far different calendar than that which is contained in the numeration of days and weeks.

He knew that Kate Lyndhurst was fully worthy of the love he so lavishly spent upon her, and yet he never drew her out, and separated her from the worldly circumstances which surrounded her. Some wish, some strong wish she might, and probably would have, to break down the barrier between them; but her uncle, ever her kind adviser, would so far restrain her, that she would see clearly the impossibility of accepting a love, which if declared, was yet certainly not offered, and her own delicate reserve would aid in deterring her.

He was reasoning so, as he sat a little tired in his chambers. His gown lay across the back of a chair, and his wig rested upon the

table, as if but recently put aside, the table itself was strewed with papers, and the room altogether told a very different tale to the one which it might have expressed when that sun, which now flagged in its autumnal course, was yet in all its summer vigour.

Mark was not ungrateful; he had pursued a steady purpose, and hope, and satisfaction had dawned, at length; and now he looked forward with deep, untiring, glowing affection to the prospect, which seemed, not an impossibility, but a probability, of restoring his poor father, so sorely wounded in the battle of life, to something like comfort, something far removed from the penury which had proved the temptation before which his spirit had fallen. No harsh judge was Mark, but pitiful and kind in his thoughts of him, as is a mother to her erring child.

He had not sat very long, before a step

was heard upon the stair, and a knock upon the panel of the door. Those sounds had now become so frequent, that the question of a clerk became one which he often considered, and they were certainly oftener met with pleasure now, than by the aching sense of disappointment, which had formerly so often followed the visits of itinerant vendors of steel pens and razors.

He was, however, not prepared to find at his door a footman in the Lyndhurst livery, who delivered him a letter, with the notification that he intended to wait for an answer.

Kate was so often her uncle's secretary, that until he opened the paper, he was not aware, that the legible but somewhat trembling characters, were the handwriting of Mr. Lyndhurst. It contained simply an invitation to dine with him that day, to talk over a matter of important business; and in

the postscript were these words, "Kate dines out to day, so that we shall be tête-à-tête."

"Mr. Lyndhurst," said the man, "hoped you would not take the trouble to write, sir, as a message would do quite as well."

"Tell him then, with my compliments, that I shall have much pleasure in dining with him," said Mark, "but he does not say at what hour."

"Seven o'clock, sir, for he thought it would give you more time."

"So it will; and I could scarcely get there before."

The servant touched his hat and departed, and Mark hastened to finish some papers which he had promised to settle that day; but he found it very difficult to disengage his mind from the invitation, which he had received from the kind old man. He had already taken the initiative, so that it could

not be to wound his delicacy by a well conceived hint, that he had sent for him. The business might, indeed, be really important, and have no private meaning for him, and yet a wild thought travelled like lightening through his mind, and seemed to fire it with its own brilliancy. It had a curious tendency, too, for instead of mystifying his faculties or dulling his perception, the intricate question of law which had been submitted to his opinion, became to him as simple as a child's spelling book. There are times when the mind gains power by excitement, and opens with almost a fresh sense of activity. Certain it was, that when his own lucid statement appeared, side by side with the entangled mass of legal matter, he smiled as he read it, over a smile of mingled excitement and triumph; triumph, which the talented may be excused if they sometimes feel, when the knowledge of their mental power is, as it were,

forced upon them. Thus employed, the time approached so close upon the hour named, that he had to dress with speed, and, as a matter of unwonted extravagance for him, to take a cab to Mr. Lyndhurst's.

The old man met him with a kindly shake of the hand; but made no allusion to business either before or at dinner. When that was concluded, however, and the dessert was set upon the table, and a dish of fresh filberts and the wine placed between them, and their chairs facing the fire-place, where a cheerful blaze, made the chilly evening but an excuse for an access of comfort, then Mr. Lyndhurst seemed to deliberate with himself, as to the best means of opening the business, which he evidently had in hand. They might have formed a good study for a painter, as they sat there during the little silence, which fell as a prelude to their after conversation. The old man, with but his expiring fire of intellect

sleeping upon his calm forehead, with his bent form, dimmed eye and white hair; and Mark opposite him, with the spring and gracefulness of youth, scarcely yet lost in the more lofty purposes of reflective manhood, with his bright keen eye, and his strong athletic form, and that perfect look of self-reliant power, which was so much a part of himself.

The old man fidgetted a little, tasted his wine, cracked a few filberts, and stirred the fire as a final effort of spirit, and then seeing that Mark was determinately silent and rather absent, he began gently.

"I have a difficult duty before me, but it is rendered less so by the certainty I possess, that I am speaking to a man who is singularly truthful. I have ever found you, out of business, where reserve is necessary and professional, as clear as a mirror."

"I trust you do me no more than justice,"

said Mark, quietly, "truth is a virtue, which should be common to all men."

"I know it, but it is not, or Proteus like, it assumes so many shapes, that we can scarcely recognise the genuine thing."

"Or, perhaps," said Mark, smiling, "you mean that falsehood has so many shapes that we cannot tell it from the truth?"

"Not that exactly; I mean, I believe, that many men, without uttering a word of falsehood, yet will not let us see the truth; they have not the courage. Truth is brave. Now in what I am going to say, it is of the most vital consequence to me that you should speak without reserve. I pray you grant me this favour."

Mr. Lyndhurst had spent much of his youth in foreign cities, and had a manner of saying things when he pleased, which was particularly winning.

Mark hesitated a little, and then look-

ing up with one of his bright glances, he said,

"You had better depend upon my general character, rather than upon any rash promises; but I may say that much, that I am not aware of anything which, as belonging to myself, I need conceal."

"Well then let me tell you first of all, that I know of the letter you have written to my niece."

Mark started and coloured.

"Now you know," continued Mr. Lyndhurst, "in my road through life, I have discovered that many men love the women they cannot marry, with, what shall I say, their imagination rather than their heart. Forgive me," he said hastily, seeing that the hot blood mounted to his temples, and that he was about to speak. "Let us speak like men, not as gentlemen, there are some seasons when the courtesies, and the reservations of society

may be put aside; in pity to an old man who is upon the brink of the grave, understand me, and let me understand you. Is that the kind of love you bear my Kate?"

"I do not comprehend you, Sir. I have made no proposals to your niece which call for the interference of her friends, I merely explained why I wished to see her no more."

"I know it—I know it; but we have a different love for that which we resign, to that which we have for what we seek. Let me ask you then, and I entreat you do not keep back the truth however hard, if your circumstances permitted you to take a wife, is my Kate the girl you would choose?"

Mark rose, and paced the room in great agitation.

"What do you think of me?" he said, "what have I done which could justify the suspicions you entertain of me?"

"That is no answer," said the old man, dejectedly.

"Have I not bowed myself in the very dust before her wealth; what would you more? Have I not said that because I could not trust myself in her company, I withdrew myself from it altogether?"

"Still you give me no answer," said Mr. Lyndhurst. "You do not love Kate."

"Love her!" said Mark, bringing himself suddenly opposite him, "do I not love her? Why would you lessen the sacrifice I have made without a word of complaint, without a single selfish reservation. Love her! were she but poor, nothing should have robbed me of her but herself. Love her! oh!"

Mark flung himself into a chair, and covering his face with his hands, groaned aloud.

"Poverty and honour are impossible," he muttered, bitterly, "no one believes even in

the existence of delicacy of feeling in a poor man."

"Oh, Mr. Hamilton, you do me injustice!" said Mr. Lyndhurst, rising and laying his hand upon his shoulder, "but let me prove you a little more. Will you, being a poor man, if with such talent as yours you can be called poor, put this fancied difference aside, and take Kate with what you term her wealth, sacrificing your pride for her sake. You do not know the obligation you would lay upon me, for where could I find such another husband for her?"

Mark was very pale, but he drew aside his hands and looked up earnestly.

"If I have done you a moment's injustice by thinking that you had found the only honourable way of wiping out a great fault; that, knowing you had gone too far for Kate's happiness, and could not go further for your own, you withdrew with a simple testimony of

admiration sufficient to satisfy her self-love—I am ready to atone for it."

He went to a drawer, and took from it a paper; and, handing it to Mark, he said,

"It is short enough; your legal eye can read it in two minutes."

Mark glanced over the paper, and saw that it was the Will of Mr. Lyndhurst, duly signed and sealed, by which he designed to leave to him the whole of his property, which consisted of no inconsiderable amount of clear thousands in the funds.

"I should have burnt this to-night," said Mr. Lyndhurst, "had our interview been unsatisfactory, although it was only drawn up this morning. My motive has been to equalize your worldly fortunes as much as possible; and, although a Will is of really little value, seeing it might be renewed to-morrow, yet this one is drawn, and, as far as I can see, it is likely to stand."

Mark rose, and grasped his hand.

"Reserve the right to alter it, my dear Sir; the present intention is sufficient to call for my unbounded gratitude; but consider well how my honour is implicated in this matter; not only am I poor, but I have to maintain my father and his family. This may be a work of years; and, in the meanwhile, I sacrifice the happiness of your niece, for it would be impossible for me to live luxuriously while they are in actual want, equally impossible for me to deprive my wife of any comfort to which she has been accustomed."

As he uttered the word 'wife,' his voice trembled. Very sweet to him was all that it implied.

"Is it so?" said Mr. Lyndhurst, smiling; "must I entreat you to take both a wife and a fortune?"

"Oh! Mr. Lyndhurst, why misunderstand me? Do you not see the force of the circumstances which have set against me?"

"I tell you what, Hamilton," said Mr. Lyndhurst, "I was in the court to-day, and had an opportunity of hearing you speak. I do assure you that I consider your eloquence an equivalent for any girl's fortune. At the same time, money is the very stepping-stone of which you stand in need. Besides this," here his voice lost its cheerfulness, "there is one very important point to be considered; Kate's health is not good, anything which fretted her might develope the malady of which her mother died."

"What was that?" inquired Mark.

"Consumption," said the old man, sadly. "Kate is very dear to me; she is the only child of my brother, who was, at one time, the only one I had to love in the world. When he died, I promised that his Kate should be as a child to me; and, when I look at her and you, I feel as if, beyond your union, there would be nothing more required for me on this side the grave. Think, if she had

fancied some young spendthrift! Why it would have broken my heart. With regard to your father, my dear Sir, make him what provision you both can spare. I know my child well enough to believe, that she would rather be happy than rich."

"You overwhelm me!" exclaimed Mark.

"Say only," said Mr. Lyndhurst, "that you accept my offer, and that no pride shall stand between us. In suffering me to adopt you as my nephew, I consider the obligation to be upon my side, for henceforth I shall esteem your legal laurels as my own."

"How can I resist so much noble kindness, which obliges me without one restriction," said Mark, rising and approaching him, and grasping his hand warmly. "If I ever render myself unworthy of the trust you have shown me, where could I find on earth a hole dark enough to hide my head in? Now let me see her."

"She is out."

"But you expect her home to-night? She knows of my being here?"

"Yes."

"And of our conversation?"

"Yes."

"It is already late," said Mark, consulting his watch, "later than usual. She must be home directly. It is twelve o'clock."

"She will wish to avoid you to-night; and if you like, you can meet to-morrow. Let us say good night."

"You sit up for her?" said Mark.

"Yes."

"Then you can have no excuse for turning me out," he said, smiling brightly, "let me stay?"

There was a sound of wheels; no, they have passed, five minutes more of silent watching, and then Mr. Lyndhurst's carriage, which always had a slow, heavy roll of its own, drove up to the door and stopped.

Mark opened the dining-room door, and sprang up stairs. He divined easily enough that she would not seek her uncle, but would, knowing he was not alone, go first to the drawing-room. So he waited there.

The stairs were lighted, and by some carelessness, the drawing-room shutters were not yet closed, so that the moon beams streamed into the room, and lit it up fitfully.

Kate seemed, as she came up, as if she were going straight on to her room, but something soothing in the moonlight attracted her, perhaps, for she stopped at the door, and looked in.

"Kate," said Mark, in a voice which seemed to come from the very fulness of his heart, and made her start with pretty consciousness.

He took her unresisting hand, and led her to a seat, with as much respect as if she had been a princess, then, taking the light from

her, he held it to the chandelier, which, in a few moments, relieved the room of its partial darkness. No one who knew Mark, could doubt how much he loved and courted light.

He turned round to her then, with a slight glow upon his face, and a bright beam in his eye, and yet with a visible hesitation of manner, which greatly differed from his usually straightforward and manly bearing.

"Kate," he said, at last, standing before her, "let us deal truly with each other to-night. Had not your uncle justified me in wooing you, nothing would have tempted me to continue an acquaintance so perilous to my happiness. I am a poor man—a poor man loaded with heavy responsibilities. The only certain provision I possess, I should forfeit by marriage, and that provision belongs to a father who can never again work for himself, or those dependent upon him. You know

that this fact is younger than our acquaintance. Had it not been so, you would never have known more than my business character, for, from the first evening that I saw you, I was yours, but with power over myself. I have not power over myself now, and therefore it was, that I ought never to see you again."

Kate looked up with the quick, timid, fawn-like manner which she sometimes had with him, so reverential, and yet so apprehensive, so shrinking, and yet so implicitly confiding.

"Think of the alternative," said Mark, going on with forced calmness. "We might engage ourselves; yielding to a present tenderness and generosity, you might be induced by beseeching words of mine to pledge yourself to a long engagement, and year after year might drag away, making you harassed and care-worn, as many a fond woman has

become before now, and leaving it as impossible for me to fulfil my pledge, as now."

"And do you think that for such considerations, I will throw away affection like your's?" said Kate with sudden energy. "I desire nothing more than to be allowed to sympathise with you, through those years of struggling hope. Oh! that you would but forgive my being rich, and let me help you in all your generous schemes."

"If I ask something calling for a still greater exercise of self denial," said Mark, "could you grant it to me? remember I have put aside all honied words, and am dealing only with plain common sense."

"What could I do more?" said Kate, growing more courageous, "than what I would gladly do. Give you all I have, to do what you like with."

"Why this, can you wait patiently until I

can honorably ask you to be my own dear wife without any self reproach? And while you wait, will you promise to send away those treacherous roses and grow healthy and strong as you may do, if you will feel in me that perfect truth and quiet confidence, which will remove from you any thing like that agitation of feeling, which makes a long engagement often so unhappy, and so injurious. You will not let me be the one to make the sacrifice, promise me that you will not sacrifice yourself to me."

"I ask no greater happiness," said Kate, "than to share your confidence, and to help to make you happy. Whatever the future may be, I leave to you; act by me, and by yourself, and by your father, as most becomes your honour."

Having sustained her dignity so far, her overcharged heart gave way. Kate covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears, and Mark standing by her side, soothed her

with such loving words as but seldom fail to whisper peace; whilst the flood gates of his love once broken through, she learned how deep and strong were those feelings which he had so forcibly restrained.

CHAPTER XV.

MARK was very early in Starborne Street the next morning, and was soon out, walking up and down, and round and about, with Margaret.

"Oh! I am so glad," Margaret had said, "so glad that you will be as happy as I am."

"Not quite," said Mark, "no one will believe it but you, I know; but it seems to me that if she had been poor I should have had nothing more to desire in her."

"With the just reliance upon yourself, which you have always had," said Margaret, "you will not feel this long. They will but lend you wealth for which you will pay them high and welcome interest. They are proud of you now, poor, striving and unsuccessful, because they divine what you are, what then will they be in time to come?"

"Always an enthusiast," said Mark laughing, "and yet for all that, you must see the difficulties of my position."

"Perfectly; but such little difficulties are so easily got over when true affection exists, and they are such trifles after all. Do not think of them since we have so much reason to be thankful. Poor Alice! I wish I could believe that she is as happy now, as she was determined before, but unhappily she has already begun to contrast herself with me.

"Never mind," said Mark, brightly, "we must not think of this, even if it be so, but

teach her to be contented with her lot, by respecting it ourselves. Come, we will go and see her now."

Turning into a wider street they came upon a house, where "Academy For Young Gentlemen," was written upon gate and door in most prominent characters. Alice was at home, and received them with a business like air. She was engaged in tying over and marking sundry jars of pickles, which were placed in a tray before her. She evidently looked upon them as idlers, and entertained them with a superior and matronly dignity, which she believed becoming in a married woman.

"Margaret will be quite the fine lady now, I suppose," she observed in the course of conversation, "and will quite look down upon poor me."

"Do not begin by looking down upon yourself," said Mark earnestly, and with the

candour which became the elder brother. "Your respect for Mr. Smith should keep you from throwing any slur upon your position now; since it has been voluntarily, nay, wilfully chosen."

Alice bit her lip, and tied a sharp knot upon the jar she was fastening up.

"Well certainly," she said, at length, "we shall know where to seek for help when we want it."

"And that I trust you never will," said Margaret warmly. "I have great confidence both in Mr. Smith's prudence and management, and in your own."

"Yes; but we shall have a hard pull for it this year," grumbled Alice. "Mr. Wynchcomb has given notice that he intends taking his two boys away next quarter, and young Nicholls is going to King's College, for his father has money left him, and I suppose he wants his son taught how to spend it. It is

not such easy work keeping a school as you may imagine; it is but a speculation after all, and we have such a heavy rent to pay for the house, that if all the bed-rooms are not full, there is a loss: and eat—oh! don't they eat." Alice tied up another jar and sighed.

"We came to tell you some news," said Margaret, anxious to turn her from her forebodings. "Mark is engaged."

"You Mark!" said Alice, "I thought you were too wise to do any thing half so foolish."

"Oh, Alice, for shame!" laughed Margaret uneasily, and then she proceeded to give her a rapid sketch of what Mark had told her.

"Well, you are lucky to step into such a fortune as that all at once," sighed Alice.

It was now Mark's turn to bite his lip, he

did not like that way of taking it at all; but as it was contrary to his habit to retaliate or retort, he rose abruptly and said they must go back,

"I might as well say good bye for good," said Alice discontentedly; "you will be such fine folks, that you will be glad to cut poor me!"

"Don't be foolish, Alice!" said Mark, irritated in spite of himself, and going down the steps in a hurry.

Alice stood upon the steps long enough to see a light carriage roll swiftly past, and stop where the brother and sister walked, and a glad recognition exchanged, as Mr. Travers leaped out and joined them; then she turned sulkily back to her pickles, and looked abstractedly at the dingy carpet and well worn curtains, so long the object of old Mrs. Smith's care.

After all, say and write what the world

may of married life, the aptest question which can be asked of it, is that which Olivia had so simply and wonderingly uttered.

"Oh Alice, do you love Mr. Smith?"

Could she have answered that question with an unhesitating affirmative, the thoughts which now harassed her would never have presented themselves. What fortune can be true to those, who, in the hour of temptation, desert themselves.

Oh! great moral suicide, in which the heart suffers a living death!

Meanwhile, Mr. Travers and Margaret and Mark walked on together, and were soon talking pleasantly, and with perfect confidence. Mr. Travers, though he judged for himself with sensitive and poetical refinement, looked upon the affairs of others with practical common sense, such as an extended intercourse with men and things was calculated to give him. He understood Mark's

scruples, but knew better than any man how to dissipate them, by sound, straightforward reasoning. He knew Mr. Lyndhurst and his daughter well, and had known them for years; he was able, therefore, to bring before Mark the isolation of their position as regarded family ties, and the great boon which Kate had conferred upon her uncle, by making a choice which far, more than any she could have made, was calculated to bring him happiness.

Mr. Travers brought with him a basket well filled with game, over which Olivia greatly rejoiced, for she had now taken the reins of housekeeping entirely into her own hands. So much, indeed, did this supply assist her in her necessary economy, that she laughingly gave her mother permission to ask the gentlemen to lunch.

This invitation was very gladly accepted, for, in spite of Mr. Travers's solemn intention not

to be in the way in Starborne Street, his wish for Margaret's society grew stronger and more exacting every day.

After lunch, there was time for a long sitting with poor Mr. Hamilton, whose humbled heart was very glad that day; and Mr. Travers read Shakespeare to him, while Margaret sat by, her heart glowing with gratitude, to think that he should so lend himself, he who was so clever and so courted, to please the poor, worn invalid whom she regarded with such constant and unabated love.

CHAPTER XVI.

AUNT ANN was in the very zenith of her glory and satisfaction, as she sat in her elegant lodgings, at half-past six, upon the evening which preceded the day fixed for her son's wedding, by only two days. She had a perfect little dinner ordered from Gunter's, which should do justice to her taste.

Miss Anstruther, dressed in a rich brown brocade, and with a wreath of white flowers in her hair, looked bridal and yet comfortable upon this chilly late autumn evening, and her

future mother-in-law regarded her with a satisfaction which proved that her misgivings had died away before the respect, which she always felt for everything that belonged to Richard; and Miss Anstruther appertained to him now, as certainly as her splendid Welsh estates would in two days more.

Aunt Ann's list of expected guests was one likely to raise her spirits. First, and always foremost, there was Richard, who might every moment be expected, to meet his betrothed and catch a few stray moments with her before the rest arrived. Then, second in her affections, and in her pride, stood the name of Margaret and then Mr. Travers, and Mark and Kate Lyndhurst, and her uncle; and because she had advocated the match, and had taken Margaret's private advice about inviting them, the newly married Mr. and Mrs. Smith.

Was there ever a little party more calculated

to warm the heart of a lover of match-making? Was it not enough to justify Aunt Ann's triumphant exclamation, that "All is well that ends well," and to excuse her returning to those weaknesses, from which her heart had been partially weaned by her brother's illness.

Aunt Ann's elegant French time-piece, watched over by a little Cupid, points its tiny hand to seven o'clock, and the room is already full. Only one is wanting, and that one the centre-figure of the group—Richard.

Miss Anstruther is less placid than usual, and there is an anxious working about her forehead and mouth as she watches the door.

Presently, a servant crosses the room, and says something in a low voice, and Aunt Ann flushes slightly, and tells aloud, with her pleasant, good-natured voice, that sudden business has prevented her son's joining them at dinner.

And then dinner is announced, and Aunt Ann gives up her beau, old Mr. Lyndhurst, to atone to Miss Anstruther for her loss, and goes on alone to take her seat at the head of her table—where there is an empty chair, and an unused knife and fork.

The supposition that business had delayed a man of Mr. Daventry's vast commercial speculations, did not weigh very heavily upon Mr. Travers, or Mark, or Kate, or upon old Mr. Lyndhurst, who made many jokes in his office of comforter; but Miss Anstruther was nervous and pale, and Margaret, who liked not the match, yet noted Richard's absence apprehensively.

Nevertheless the dinner was a merry one; Mark and Mr. Travers talked brilliantly, Kate supported the conversation with her usual frankness and earnestness, and won much upon Margaret's regard; and all paid Mr. Smith and Alice sufficient attention to banish,

for the time at least, his jealousy of the wealthy and the well born.

In the evening, Aunt Ann, who loved such vanities, displayed with pride the splendid jewels which had been presented by Richard to his betrothed, and the magnificent trifles which formed so large a part of her bridal preparations. All were examined and admired, as by those whose own thoughts were too intent upon bridal topics, to think them uninteresting; and the bright eye and flushing cheek of the bride elect, showed that Richard's absence had been temporarily forgotten. But the most pleasant evening will end; and all to departed, at length, save Margaret, who was to sleep there and remain for the wedding. And so Margaret, and Julia, and Aunt Ann were left alone and still upon the table lay little heaps of flashing jewellery.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE autumnal afternoon was gusty and cold, and the storm burst forth at intervals, but the wind was too high to let the rain come down freely. About five o'clock in the afternoon, Richard Daventry, holding above him an obstinate umbrella, turned through the large gateway of Clifford's Inn. He then seemed undecided as to his exact course, and after standing until his umbrella, which was of the most fragile French make, was nearly turned inside out, he crossed over

to where one of the porters was standing, and inquired if he could direct him to the office of Mr. Sturn. This he was immediately able to do, and Richard went on until he came to the furthest corner; here he stopped a moment, then seeing that Mr. Sturn's office was upon the ground floor, he closed the refractory umbrella and went in.

He found Mr. Sturn alone. He was a middle aged man, with a countenance strongly denoting indecision, and there was something about the man which told that he was not a lawyer of the first class. He was evidently busy clearing off business that he might get away home, and quite forgetful whether it was wet or dry, calm or windy. As "client" was written so legibly in the business lines of Richard's face, he brushed away some space for him at the table, and requested him to sit down. Richard took the proffered seat with the air of a man, who, for many years,

had been accustomed to hurry himself for no one's pleasure but his own. Then he asked quietly,

"You are, I believe, Miss Anstruther's solicitor?"

"What Miss Anstruther?" said Mr. Sturn.

"The owner of the Llanlin estates in Glamorganshire," said Richard, rather haughtily.

"No, indeed!" said Mr. Sturn, "but I was her father's solicitor, and am—"

"Well?" said Mr. Daventry.

"Really, Sir," said the attorney, "I have known the family for many years, and, pray excuse me, but you are quite a stranger to me."

"I am about to be married to Miss Anstruther," replied Richard, firmly and at once. "My name is Daventry—Richard Daventry."

Mr. Sturn bowed; the name he said, was

familiar to him, although he had never before had the pleasure of seeing him.

Richard continued.

"Miss Anstruther mentioned you as her solicitor."

"There must be some mistake. I do transact business for her brother, certainly."

"Her brother!" exclaimed Richard, "I never heard of him."

"No doubt—no doubt! perhaps I have said too much. Pardon me, I am attached to the family, and—and I have said too much."

Richard confronted him with a cheerful expression, although his face was pale.

"You are right," he said, drawing a piece of paper towards him, and beginning to write; "But you say you are not Miss Anstruther's solicitor. I make you mine, and pay you this upon account."

He passed over the paper, still wet,

which a few hasty lines, and his signature, had converted into a cheque for a hundred pounds.

"Why, really, Sir, this makes a difference; and, as you say, not being employed by Miss Anstruther ——"

"You are at liberty to oblige me," said Richard, coolly; "and my present wish is to ask your legal advice."

"Certainly, Sir, certainly," said Mr. Sturn, carefully examining the cheque, and then replacing it upon the table.

"My acquaintance has not been a very long one with Miss Anstruther," said Mr. Daventry, with the appearance of a man, who, having determined to take advice, was also determined to be candid. "It was a matter of little consequence to me, whether Miss Anstruther were rich or poor; but, upon her first introduction to society, it was confidently stated that her father had left to her, his only child, the Glamorganshire estates, and money besides,

It was my intention, therefore, to settle upon her, and upon her children, these estates, together with such addition as might seem adequate on my part. I came to you, therefore, to learn the amount of her property; for I do not know why, but for some reason or other, which to you and me, plain business men, looks a little suspicious, she utterly refuses to have any settlement."

Mr. Sturn smiled a superior, legal smile, and then explained hastily.

"The Glamorganshire estates belong not to her, but to her brother."

Richard was too accustomed to talk over business to show feeling here, and he only enquired simply:

"I told you I never heard of this brother. Where is he?"

"He is generally abroad, somewhere in Germany; and, to tell you the truth, is so deeply involved, that he dare not show his face in England. In fact, Sir, he is almost imbe-

cile, and has been for many years a dead letter in his family; when I say imbecile, Sir, I mean as far as anything like common sense or self-restraint is concerned, though, in the society he frequents, he passes, no doubt, as well as many others. I do the best I can for him; but, if he does not stop soon, Llanlin will be in the market before many months are past, and he has only been in possession little better than a year."

"And Miss Anstruther herself, what property has she?"

"A hundred a year, chargeable on the estate."

"You are positive of this fact?"

"Positive. Stay, if you like, you can see a copy of the will, for I have it here."

He went to a tin box; and, after searching a little, drew out a roll of papers.

Sitting down by Richard, they ran over the clauses together, as coolly as if both were equally indifferent to its contents. The facts

were plain. Mr. Sturn's statement was evidently correct.

Richard rose, at length, thanked him with a gentlemanly courtesy, which he could assume at will; and, leaving the cheque upon the table, took up the refractory umbrella, and, as quietly as he had come, went out again into the blustering wind and rain, leaving Mr. Sturn in total ignorance as to the thoughts or feelings of his new and liberal client.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AUNT ANN, Margaret, and Miss Anstruther were left alone, and in little heaps upon the table lay the flashing jewellery. But, scarcely had the last sound of carriage-wheels died along the street, when the drawing-room door opened, and Richard came in. There must have been some look of extreme pain upon his colourless face, which rendered even his mother silent, as they all three turned to look at him.

"Mother—Margaret!" he said, "you will excuse me, but I wish to speak alone with Miss Anstruther."

"Well, then, Margaret," said Aunt Ann, to whom Richard's slightest word was law, "let us come to the dining-room, the fire is still in, and we will sit there until Richard has had his say."

Turning to look at her for an instant, Margaret saw, with pity, the pale, stricken, anxious face of Miss Anstruther, as she rested one hand upon the table, so emblazoned with her bridal jewels; and, then, following Aunt Ann, she closed the door behind her upon the meeting of the betrothed.

"What is it, Richard, you terrify me?" said Julia.

Richard walked to the table, and stood opposite her, glancing for one instant only at the bridal gems.

"It is necessary that we should understand each other," said he calmly, "therefore I will

give you the history of my afternoon's adventures, and the motives which led me to enter upon them. First, for the motives: I determined to emulate your very generous offer of marrying me without a settlement, by forcing one upon you, the liberality of which could not be questioned. I was resolved, that no one should say that I had merged your splendid fortune in my commercial speculations; and, besides, as a matter of business, I thought it necessary to set aside from those speculations a certain proportion of my capital, as a provision for you, for my children and for myself. For this purpose I visited Mr. Sturn, your solicitor, to-day; and from him I learnt, that to your brother, of whom I had never before heard, the bulk of your father's property naturally descended, leaving for yourself a simple provision of one hundred a year, chargeable upon the estate. Is this true or not?"

He stood with his arms folded, looking sternly at her. When he came to this question, she seemed as if about to approach him, but he warned her from him with one hand, as he himself moved a step back.

"Oh, Richard!" she cried piteously.

"Is this true or not?" he repeated.

"True!" she said, "true! but oh, Richard! was it for my money you loved me; and you so rich? Oh, you never loved me!"

"We are at confession," said Richard sarcastically, "hear mine. I first sought you from pique, you know why as well as I do, you know I loved Margaret Hamilton; but understand me, I learned to love you, I should have loved you well; and once married, respect for myself would have made you a wife, honoured and beloved. I thank Heaven that I have been spared such a calamity, though I deserved it for venturing, even for an hour, to trifle with those feelings which

are implanted in our nature for the highest purposes."

"Richard, you will kill me! Oh! do not cast me off, only because I am poor."

"Poor! not that. Hear me in plain terms, for it saves time; you are a hypocrite, and if you have not spoken a lie, you have acted one, think you I would trust my honour to a woman who could so cunningly deceive me."

"I loved you! oh, forgive me! that was why I had not the courage to tell you the truth."

"Loved!" said Richard with bitter scorn, "aye, that poor excuse might have served, if the lie had not been acted before you knew me."

"You will not cast me off! oh, forgive me!" she sprang towards him and knelt at his feet, "you will not expose me. Were all your professions false? No, oh, no! you were not so cruel as not to mean them!"

"Forgive me!" said Richard with quiet scorn, as he extended his hand to raise her, "I will do anything in the world for you but—marry you."

She rose, utterly confounded, and staggering back to a chair, sank into it almost fainting, until an hysterical fit of weeping came to her relief. She spoke truly when she said that she loved him; but, perhaps, the heaviest earthly punishment which rests upon the hypocrite, is, that even the truth is not believed. Richard evidently regarded her emotion as simple acting.

"Weak as you supposed me, and easy dupe as you would have made me, the last has not been quite so easy as you fancied. But now let us come to terms. I will not speak even to my mother of what I have discovered; I will give no cause for the cancelling of our engagement, and as your present preparations have, no doubt, been

expensive, I will make you a present of these jewels; and if their sale produces a sum insufficient to defray any further expense which you have incurred, I will make up the deficiency. Further, if more compensation be required, your solicitor and mine may settle the matter; and I promise to come to terms."

Julia listened in silence, there was nothing perceptible to her but a dull sensation of misery and shame, as she covered her face with her hands.

"Acting!" said Richard to himself, and the word was a very panoply of strong armour against pity or weakness. So much had his pride been wounded by her deception, that even his vanity would not suffer itself to be flattered.

"If Storr and Mortimer's bill is forwarded to me," he said quietly, "it shall immediately be settled; and they will probably take these off your hands again."

He stood as if waiting to see if she would

say anything, but for a long time there was no answer.

"Forgive me! oh, forgive me!" sobbed Julia.

He held out his hand gravely.

"I forgive you, indeed, and trust that this will afford a useful lesson for the future. There is nothing to be ashamed of in a hundred a-year," said the man of many thousands, "and I shall trust to hear soon that you are more comfortably settled than, under the circumstances, you could possibly have hoped to be with me."

She did not take his hand, there was something too steady and business-like in his tone for her to hope that either grief or blandishment could avail with him now, and after a minute's pause, Richard took up his hat and left the room.

He stopped before he left the house, to notify, by a few hastily written lines to his mother, the breaking off of his intended

marriage, adding, that although he should not see her until Miss Anstruther had left, he trusted she would be treated with every kindness.

The next morning, Miss Anstruther left for the house of a distant relative residing in London. Trusting to Richard's promise of silence, she contrived to throw as much blame as possible upon him, and departed with the fullest commiseration from Aunt Ann, who called her a suffering dove, and the most unhappy creature in the world, for having from some innocent cause, displeased Richard.

Yet, in the midst of all her pity and trouble, weeping unrestrainedly upon Margaret's shoulder, she felt, that day, as if a great weight had been taken off her mind; as if some hidden charm which had held her spirits had been broken, some shadow which had fallen between herself and the sunlight removed. Richard with all his faults, and pride and prejudice, was her own Richard once again.

Richard called the next day, at Storr and Mortimer's, and discharged Miss Anstruther's bill, and then waited to hear from her solicitor. But as it so happens, that the most cowardly have dignity sometimes, the liar sometimes tells the truth, and the thief is sometimes honest; so Miss Anstruther, whatever her future speculations might be, demanded no compensation for this the heaviest loss she ever sustained. She really loved Richard!

Richard to his dying day, will think how well she acted!

CHAPTER XIX.

For many weary days, Frederick Hamilton had, Whittington like, sought his fortune through the eastern streets of the great metropolis. Nothing had seemed to daunt or turn him from his purpose of answering every one of the advertisements in the 'Times,' which in any way met his views; neither rain, nor dust, nor weariness, and often hunger, prevented his determination from having its way. But it was not to seek his fortune that he was now treading the fashionable

streets, or diverging into the cheap localities; weary and footsore, and yet with a certain proud hopefulness all the while, as he gazed wistfully in at the shop windows, and then turned to look at the one shilling and sixpence which he kept so securely in his waistcoat pocket, the repeated holes in which had been so often mended by Margaret's loving fingers. Margaret—yes! it was for her that he was seeking now a marriage present, a present which should carry his boy love with her into her affluent marriage days. He had a glory and a pleasure in this marriage. The tenderness with which Mr. Travers had carried him in his strong manly arms from the ice to his carriage, had invested him in his eyes with peculiar interest; and Margaret, whose powerful love had borne them all up through those terrible days of pressure and poverty, who could hope for good, if she remained unblessed?

Poor boy! gazing at those handsome plate-

glass windows, through which the burnished silver looked so bright, and so like the life to which his Margaret was going; he knew that in these shops all articles were beyond his purse, but he was not so well acquainted with the prices of miscellaneous pretty things which met his view, and often he turned from the shops, his hot boyish blood burning in his face, when he had been told that one article was seven and sixpence, and another five shillings. Tired with his search and with the growing sense of the insignificance of his eighteen pence, he turned homewards through the cheap localities; but still looking earnestly all the way, for the investment must be made. To-morrow is the wedding day.

At length as he approached Islington, his attention was attracted by a little second-hand curiosity shop, where he discovered a small bronze owl, which blinked at him with an air of superior wisdom. Was it simply an

ornament, he asked of the man inside. No, a lucifer box! What was the price? One shilling and eightpence. But without the lucifers? Fred gravely suggested, drawing the two coins from his pocket. The old shopman replied that without the lucifers, he would make the owl one and sevenpence, and cheap enough it was. Fred, however, protested that he had not another penny in his pocket, and after some demur the bargain was made, and the owl his own, minus the lucifers. He walked out of the shop with the air of a man who has made a good investment of capital, hugging the bird of wisdom in the most affectionate manner all the time.

"There is no vulgarity about this owl," he reasoned to himself, as he went on in well pleased cogitation, "it may stand by Sèvres china and not look mean, she won't be ashamed of this, even in her new home."

Walking on, he had scarcely time to

observe that the light carriage with its fiery and magnificent horse, belonging to Mr. Travers, was coming along the road with its usual rapid speed, though he found time to raise his cap to his future brother as he passed him; but he felt a little sad all the while. That thoroughly fashionable carriage, that horse and that groom in his dark green livery, looked all so far above Starborne Street, that for the first time he felt the possibility, nay the extreme probability of Margaret's being removed from them by something greater even than marriage.

He felt a curious desolation and misanthropy stealing over him, from which he was roused by finding that the groom had dismounted, and was running after him with the request that he would speak with Mr. Travers, who had been unable to pull up so suddenly, and was waiting for him a few yards further down.

Fred glanced down at his jacket, grown so white in the seams, and so short at the wrists; but in an instant overcoming his shyness, he turned back to the carriage.

How well Mr. Travers looked, as men only can look when satisfied with themselves and others; what subdued but perfect happiness gleamed from those large intellectual eyes, whose benevolent fire had not been quenched by all the evil and duplicity which he, knowing the world as he did, could not but have detected in it.

Stooping down to shake Fred by the hand, he said he had been on the look out for him, and that at home they knew of his intention of carrying him back if he met him, to dine with him at his hotel.

"Never mind that, I am quite alone," said Mr. Travers frankly, seeing Fred glance again at his jacket, "and we have some business to talk over; get up, my dear fellow."

Fred was by his side in a moment, and the groom taking his place behind with a good tempered look, reflected, perhaps, from his master, they were soon at full speed again.

What business could Mr. Travers have to talk over on the eve of his wedding, when he might reasonably be thinking only of himself and his bride.

"It does a boy good," said Mr. Travers, as they sat together after dinner, "to see a little of the difficulty of getting on in the world, that he may the more appreciate the advantages thrown in his way by relatives and friends, so that this month of hard work, although it may have done ill service to the Latin and Greek, will be no bad preparation for a school through which, for all our sakes, I trust you will fight your way with that industry and determination, which alone will render any assistance of mine available."

He then told him that he had obtained his

father's consent to send him to the Charter House, and that if industrious there, he would gladly frank him at one of the Universities.

Fred hesitated, the favour was overwhelming, and he had already learned enough of the hard side of the world to appreciate the full importance of the obligation; ought he to accept it?

These doubts were hesitatingly confessed.

"Yes, my dear boy, you ought for your own sake, and for Margaret's; to say that I despise that wealth with which I have been endowed for high purposes, would be a folly and an absurdity; but I may say that I shall prize it far more, if I am permitted to minister with it to her happiness. If you will only remember how proud she will be if you succeed in life, how deeply grieved if you fail: believe me that the gratitude you speak of will be upon my side, and not upon yours."

There was so much genuine earnestness in what he said, that Frederick fully believed him, and accepted his kindness with more frankness and enthusiasm, than it is often possible to shew, when receiving a great benefit.

So happy and at their ease did they become, too, in a little while, that Fred in a gush of confidence drew forth his owl for inspection, and Mr. Travers seemed as much interested in this intended gift to his bride, as the boy himself was, and little knowing how much the addition would be appreciated, he himself filled it with lucifers. In such simple kindness, he was well contented to spend the first portion of this his second marriage eve; but when Fred, smiling and happy, had gone away, he gave his servant the order that he should be interrupted no more that night, and the few remaining hours he spent in solemn self-communing and deep and earnest gratitude. He brought no doubt with him to the altar.

In Margaret, his rest and confidence were perfect and complete.

Once again life was to him new and young, and he accepted it with reverence and awe.

CHAPTER XX.

"MARGARET," said Olivia.

Margaret sat by her father's bed-side, her hand in his, and so absorbed in the reverie into which both had fallen, that Olivia had to repeat her call before she found attention. Margaret was indulging in thoughts of repose and peace, which came like balm after her many days of suffering. As if to reward her for the patience and strength with which she had breasted the storms of adversity, her mind was filled now with a noble calm. As

she looked upon the future, of which the morrow was to be the beginning, she beheld it without presumption, and equally without misgiving. Not only did she feel that the step she was taking was likely to ensure her happiness and that of him most dear to her, but also that it would be beneficial to those she was about to leave, how far she did not yet fully know, but she had an implicit trust in his nobility and generosity, and in his tender love for her. A new life, of hope, of energy, of affection and duty lay before her, and she was about to enter upon it with the dignified bearing of one who, under Divine help, has learned by severe experience to trust and rely upon herself. Looking into that bright future with those pure eyes, which even now are dimmed by the sorrow of parting, her father's hand in hers—hers which had ever been ready to sustain and uphold him—well might she be lost in thought, in the

mingling of sad memories with happy hopes.

"Margaret, do come down if you please, dear, and see how it looks," reiterated Olivia; and a dawning blush stole over Margaret's features as she kissed the hand she resigned, and then followed Olivia down stairs.

The younger sister led the way with a light step to the little drawing-room, where the simple marriage breakfast was all ready prepared. Olivia had elected herself as perpetual housekeeper with general consent; and to her now experienced contrivance, and Mary's ready aid full honour was due. Many secret conferences had taken place upon the subject, and Mr. Travers had so far been admitted into her confidence as to be permitted to furnish game, and fruit, and flowers, of all which Olivia well knew how to make the most, so as to supply other deficiencies. It is true that all the massive silver plate which

used to adorn the rich banker's table, had passed away with his other wealth, and the finely cut glass had figured at the sale in Westbourne Terrace long ago; and these deficiencies had been supplied by a loan from the silversmith and the chinaman; still, everything was so simple and so tasteful in its arrangement, that Margaret felt that even Mr. Travers's perfect taste would be satisfied, and gave Olivia the praise for which she was thirsting.

The beautiful hot-house flowers, and the blooming autumnal fruit were so judiciously displayed, that the simple breakfast looked far beyond what it really was, whilst all the little ready make-shifts for tables and chairs were admirably managed; and considering that Mr. and Mrs. Smith, Aunt Ann, and Richard, and Kate Lyndhurst, and her uncle, good Dr. Arden, and the clergyman, and Mr. Travers's selected friend, were the only guests, there

seemed a possibility of entertaining them with comfort.

Whilst the sisters stood in contemplation, Frederick walked in.

"I hope I have not been wanted," he observed, with a mixture of contrition and importance.

"Yes, indeed, in a hundred ways, you naughty boy," said Olivia; "but where have you been?"

"With Mr. Travers;" he replied, his face all glowing with pleasure, "and, Margaret, what do you think? I am going to the Charter House, and then to Oxford if I get on!"

"Is he going to send you?" enquired Margaret, her face answering his in its quick glow of pleasure; not only was her boy brother benefited, but he she loved, honoured in the doing of it.

"That he is! and see if I don't work, that's all!"

"Of course you will," said Margaret, "I know it, I am sure of it," and then she murmured to herself, "my dear William, how love or honour you enough."

"And Margaret, will you have this in remembrance of me?" said Fred, half proudly and half shyly bringing out his owl; and adding, when she was admiring it and thanking him, and declaring how much she should prize it. "Look here, *he* put in the lucifer matches!"

Very pleasant it was to her to find how much Mr. Travers tried to win the hearts which were so dear to her.

CHAPTER XXI.

It was a dark November morning, with heavy clouds overhead, held back by a low sullen wind, which, in the country, would have torn down the colored leaves from the trees, or would, on the sea, have covered it with breakers and white foam; but in Islington, it had nothing more to do than to raise the dust from the summer-burnt roads, and toss, and whirl, and pursue it headlong down the streets.

Yet even here, there was a kind of awe and solemnity about it, which seemed more suited,

than summer sunshine, to the majesty of the ceremony in which Margaret and Mr. Travers plighted to each other their mutual faith, with such great strength and love. The dark morning made that after little scene in Starborne Street, stand out in brighter and fuller contrast.

It was not a merry party, the past was too near for merriment, but happy, bright and peaceful it was beyond a doubt. It was more like the morning of a happy future, whose dim sky and dewy landscape promise the brightness of a glorious day. In the hearts of bride and bridegroom, there was respect for the great grief of the past, and a reverence for the dawning happiness which seemed opening upon them.

Richard is there with a costly present for the bride. Circumstances (what a convenient word!) had touched some latent good within him, and made him a truer-hearted man than he was before. Kate Lyndhurst is there, too,

in all the blushing honour of her newly confessed attachment.

Alice contemplates with satisfaction the handsome bracelet presented by her new brother; and begins to find a source of comfort in the knowledge that Margaret's newly acquired riches will quite shut out the expectation of any help from Mr. Smith, while she begins to feel that she might have gone further and fared worse, and is wisely resolved to make the most of her husband, and to adroitly discover the extent of Mr. Travers' influence, and if judicious to drop the school, and revive her husband's old scheme of going into the church. All this passes through her mind, as she slowly eats a slice of pine which affords a vivid remembrance of the rich man's hothouses.

Mr. Travers is pleasant with all, and tries with that easy manner of his, which always does succeed when he pleases to use it, to make a real impression upon the chosen few

about him. He draws Mark aside, and begs him to make no family arrangements until he hears from Margaret, and tells him how grieved she would be to be left out of the family councils.

Then Margaret goes to take leave of her father alone. She is leaving him strong in his humility, and she knows that her parting is to be the means of blessing; yet in that steady paleness, may still be read much of the suffering she has endured for him, and for the first time that morning, tears of both sorrow and joy force their way, and give her over-charged heart relief.

Mr. Travers met her as she came down with her two bridesmaids from that tiny bed-room, where she has felt and experienced so much in the last two years, and parting her from them, he whispered low,

"My Margaret will not refuse my first present?" and pressed into the hand which he clasped with so much fondness, a small

envelope, upon which was written, "To my dear mother, from her affectionate daughter, Margaret Travers."

No husband's present could have been better timed, or better chosen. The envelope contained an enclosure in notes of a hundred pounds, and would enable her to leave with a greater feeling of comfort than could otherwise have been possible to her. He saw this, and was contented as she placed her hand so confidingly in his, when he led her to his carriage, and as its light wheels left Starborne Street behind her, he murmured:

"Ten thousand blessings upon you, my love, my wife."

The blessing of her old home is already stretching out, and ready to embrace her new one. Sorrow may touch, and touching may refine and purify, but it may not wither hearts like hers.

CHAPTER XXII.

One month had passed away, and Margaret was at home at "The Cedars." The winter had set in now with stern determination. The lofty cedars looked down upon the lawn which lay white with frost, and seemed in their unchangeable green, to defy both cold and tempest. How strong they looked those noble trees, and what an aspect of strength and security they spread around them, not gloom, there was nothing like gloom about them, there was something too comfortable and genial every where about the premises for anything like that.

In the large dining-room, where it is the habit of Mr. Travers to take breakfast, Margaret has come down upon her first morning to make the tea. The room is large and lofty, and would on such a morning as this be cold, if those immense knobs of coal were not sending such a cheerful blaze up the chimney. Margaret is standing by the table. The simple dress of fine brown French merino falling round her in heavy folds, with the long simple sleeves, and the snow white embroidery become her well, and set off to advantage the fresh colour, and renewed health and loveliness which the last few weeks of intellectual loving companionship have procured for her. As she stands there, with her queen-like figure and graceful repose of manner, she looks perfectly at home.

Wealth, with all its appendages is so natural to her, that to see her now, Starborne Street might be but a dream from which she has awakened. No trembling doubt like that

which surrounds the life of the "Lovely Lady" may wear her mind. She is at home in her husband's house, perfectly at home, in the easy command and luxurious position to which it entitles her.

From whence then comes that lurking shadow which rests like a cloud upon her brow. She is watching that bright flame and that lavish expenditure of coals; and again she sits in fancy by the small black fire in Starborne Street, and hears the grating noise caused by a fresh visit from Mary to the coal-cellar, which had so often made her heart ache.

The door opens and Mr. Travers comes in fresh from his morning walk, which it is his unfailing custom to take, and she turns round to meet him with such a radiant smile, *that* he stands still to watch her.

"What a comfortable wife you look," he said at length, advancing to her side.

"You might have studied for a long time

without finding a compliment I should like better," replied Margaret.

"True," replied her husband, "for to feel quite comfortable in another's company, is a great sign of love. How grateful I am to see you here I cannot tell. Are you happy, darling; quite happy?"

He held his arm round her now, and looked fondly down upon her upturned face.

"No!" she exclaimed with a little look of beautiful defiance, which passed away instantly, however; and her expressive eyes filled full with tears, as she exclaimed with passionate enthusiasm, "Yes, I am indeed happy, exquisitely happy, but—"

"But?" interrogated he.

"I was thinking of home that was all, and feeling as if, perhaps, I had been selfish to come away."

"My own wife! you are right. I have given way to my usual indolent dislike of money matters, and refused to see your anxiety; yet

it was partly because I longed to have a request from you which I might grant. Give me a cup of very strong tea and then we will have a long business talk. Where is Ada I wonder?"

"She is feverish, and seems inclined to rest," replied Margaret, "and so I have sent her some breakfast. I think the excitement of seeing us has been too much for her."

"You will forgive her petulance last night?" he enquired anxiously.

"Of course I will. She seems to me to possess a very nervous susceptible temperament, requiring very judicious management. If you think it right," she said, with some little hesitation, "as Mrs. Cotgrave cannot return to her, I should like to have her entirely to myself for a little while. It is difficult to tell what are the impressions given by a third party, and it is very important for all our sakes that she should love and trust me. She is not strong enough for many

lessons at present; but I promise you that her education shall not be neglected."

"You will over task yourself," said Mr. Travers.

"When you find that that is the case, you may interfere; until then, let me have my own way."

"You cannot think how happy such an arrangement would make me. You will meet with many difficulties; but she so much needs strength of character, that this plan of yours might be of the greatest benefit to her."

"Well, then, I shall try my best."

"But promise to tell me candidly when you are tired; for a few weeks only might be of great service."

Margaret smiled; for she knew that her plan of weeks might probably become one of years. She had no wish to supersede his affection for Ada; and she saw already how, without the most watchful culture, she would cause him unhappiness. Could any pains be

too great to shield him from such a domestic sorrow?

Breakfast over, Mr. Travers led her to his library. Opposite his own, was a chair curiously carved in oak, with a green velvet seat; cut in the oak back was the crest of the Hamiltons.

"This," said her husband, seating her in it, "is yours; whenever you feel disposed to honour me with your presence, you will remember that this chair waits you. Although I love and require privacy, and would exact it from all the world, yet I wish you quite to understand that you are an exception to this rule, as in my eyes you are an exception to all women."

Margaret could not but appreciate this tender acknowledgment of his love; but she took her seat, with some little embarrassment, happy as she was; for he walked to a side closet, and brought out what, by the sight, she knew so well, a heavy banking book. He

then proceeded to do what every wise man should do. He laid before her an exact statement of his income, upon what depending, and how invested. He then showed her another book, containing a clear and concise amount of his annual expenses; and, then, as clearly explained how he expected their marriage would increase the claims upon his purse.

"I explain this," he said, when he had finished, "in order that we may act in all our arrangements with the same mind, for I have always avoided money embarrassments, and hope ever to do so, as far as my own expenditure lies. You have been taught this first law of common sense by a sad experience, about which I have only moralized or dreamed. After all, you must now cease to regret the past, for the trials of poverty give strength to the mind; do you not think so?"

"Poverty brings us more in contact with actual life, certainly," said Margaret, "and makes us see things as they really are, but

I think I am hardly calculated to form a right judgment of it, because we did not suffer simply from poverty. What is commonly called a 'reverse of circumstances,' brings with it sorrow as well as actual privation."

"True," said Mr. Travers sadly, "how happy I should have been if I could have sooner saved you."

"All good comes in its appointed time," said Margaret, "if we were only patient, it would never come too late."

"We will hope not," replied her husband gently, "but it is difficult for one so prosperous as myself to judge for the unhappy. Now then, love, you see my settled income, and you will be able to judge, whether what I propose is right or not, for I would not do anything until you could do it with me. I think of purchasing an annuity of three hundred pounds upon the joint lives of your father and mother, as a present from

you to them, and I have a small house in this neighbourhood, which shall be theirs, rent free, if they like to take it. During the winter, you can amuse yourself by furnishing it for them. Remember, in making this their certain income, independent of ourselves, I do not wish to limit any further help which they may require; but merely to give them a certain provision in case we should be unfortunate enough to offend them at any time."

"Oh! William, how can I ever thank you?"

"Easily enough," said her husband smiling, "give me that place in your affections to which I am legally entitled, and I will ask no more. Now will you write to Mark, and tell him what we mean to do, and say that for one year at least, we are anxious that he should feel free to increase his connection, and if possible to put himself in a position to marry. He needs such temporary freedom, but beyond that I think he will require little. In a year hence, if I prove a true prophet he

will not be a rising, but a risen man. In the meanwhile, I intend to have your Aunt down, bring her in here, and give her such a lecture upon her duties as she never had before, if only in revenge for the trouble she has given us. Ah! but that reminds me," he cried seizing his cheque book, and clipping off one of its leaves.

"Pray send her that by this post. I wish we had done it before; but, being of my drawing, she will understand that there are no secrets between us."

Margaret rose from the carved oak chair, in which she had sat like some fair queen; and, passing over to him, and kneeling gently down by his side, poured forth her whole woman's heart in its truth and passionate devotion.

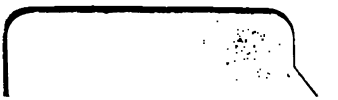
A month or two was sufficient to complete the arrangements which Mr. Travers had thus

planned; and Margaret had the satisfaction of seeing her father once more brought within her influence, and surrounded by those moderate, but substantial comforts, which he was alone able now to enjoy, with the great solace of Mr. Travers's society near at hand. Frederick had entered at the Charter House, with determined industry, and Mark was rising as rapidly as his career had hitherto seemed dormant and unpromising. While Olivia, refined and ennobled by trial, enjoyed every advantage which Margaret's loving care could procure for her, and became a frequent and cherished guest at "The Cedars."

Satisfied from without, and with all her many causes for heart-ache laid to rest, Margaret could give her full, deep sympathy to her husband, glory in his literary fame, and repose tranquilly upon his strong, untiring affection.

Happy, thrice happy, are those, who, like

her, looking rather to the sky above them, than to the rough and flinty stones beneath their feet, tread unflinchingly the straight and narrow road to the end.

THE END.

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